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WHAT HAPPENED TO MARY

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WHAT HAPPENED TO MARY

What Happened to Mary

A NOVELIZATION FROM THE PLAY AND THE STORIES APPEARING IN THE LADIES' WORLD

BY

ROBERT CARLTON BROWN

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WOR 19FEB'36

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE STAGE PRODUCTION AND THE MOVING PICTURE PLAY

Miss Olive Wyndham as Mary in the play.

Miss Mary Fuller as Mary in the moving picture play.

The fascination of a youthful comrade lures Mary from household duties.

Mary seeks a protector in her old friend Cap'n Jogifer.

Mary is inspired with grave doubts by Daisy Meade's changed attitude.

Mary suspects Rayner, and tries her skill at detective work.

Mary rejects the first of her many suitors.

Liza Peart brings out the little hand-made dress Mary wore as a baby.

WHAT HAPPENED TO MARY

CHAPTER I

MARY'S FIRST ADVENTURE

THE nursery was silent. Its crisp chintz curtains hung motionless, a nurse slipped about noiselessly on rubber heels; and the rest of the house was as quiet.

Suddenly the pink girl baby stirred in her fleecy blue bassinet and puckered her flower-like face in a cry. There was no mother to answer. The nurse went quickly to warm a bottle of milk. A newspaper rustled to the floor of an adjoining room and eager steps hurried to the nursery.

An elderly man, his frame but the shell of its former fullness, entered; weak, faded blue eyes agleam as he approached the baby's basket and reached out a wrinkled, quivering white hand soothingly toward the distressed bit of humanity. There was motherliness in his manner and a quick sense of anxiety which seemed to pervade the whole empty house.

The nurse returned with a tiny bottle in a silk crocheted case. She smilingly took the baby, cuddled her close, and touched the puckered lips with the rubber nipple. There was instant quiet.

Grandfather Craig sat down hard in a low rocking chair. "Well, well," he breathed in relief. "Just hungry."

"That's all," smiled Nurse.

Grandfather Craig watched the babe drink its milk, a mild mellow glow on his broad, fine old face.

When the bottle was quite empty and Nurse held it up with pride in her charge's appetite, Grandfather Craig rubbed smooth palms briskly together and said with the eagerness of a boy, "And now we'll weigh little Mary."

Every day he gained a handicap on Nature by having Baby weighed immediately after a bottle.

"Thirteen pounds and seven ounces," announced the nurse, having rested Mary for a moment in a beribboned basket scale.

"Good! Good!" Grandfather Craig rubbed his palms of bank note smoothness in delight. "That girl will be able to take care of herself."

"She'll be beautiful, lithe and graceful," agreed Nurse. "At four months, to weigh nearly fourteen pounds! It is remarkable! And such a perfect back, and well modeled form. Her flesh is as springy as rubber."

"That is all due to your good care," said Grandfather Craig, in a courtly manner. "Four months old," he repeated, a vague,

wistful light coming into his wavering eyes. He walked out of the room as Mary dozed off in blissful content.

Dropping into a loungy leathern chair in the bedroom adjoining, which he had converted into a chess room since the advent of Mary, that there might be close association between his two pleasures in life, Grandfather Craig sat down at a glass-topped table and stretched his arms before him. He rested his head wearily and closed his eyes in a daydream. At last after forty years of yearning he had a baby girl to fondle. Boys had blighted Craig's life. He had had six of them in all and when five of those were dead, a seventh boy, a grandson, had come to irritate and annoy him. Then, at last, when he was about to give up in despair, Mary had arrived. She more than took the place of her wayward father, who had died six months before.

Immediately on her birth Craig had left his lodgings at the club and bought the big empty house, where he carried the frail mother and child. The widowed mother had lingered only a few weeks before giving up the struggle, and then Grandfather Craig and Nurse were left alone with Mary. He gave up what little business he had still clung to and spent his days at the baby's side, listening to her breathing, counting the minutes between her feedings and

exercising all the caution, and having all the worry, of a mother.

He made great plans for Mary. Naturally, she was to be his sole heir. His remaining son, the disappointing Richard, should not figure; nor the three year old grandchild, Henry. Mary should have everything. He only hoped he could live to see her enjoy the money he had at first painfully scraped together and afterward had guarded zealously as it grew.

All the castles he had built in Spain, and been too busy to occupy and enjoy, should be Mary's. He looked forward to spoiling her. With this child he would not make the mistake of harshness which had estranged his sons. He would only love and cherish Mary.

He reviewed his life as he sat with bowed head. It had been pinched, cramped and narrow. He had thought too much of money, and not enough of people. Still, his boys had been ungrateful. Probably he had been in the wrong, but he would make it all up with the girl. He could see her dancing and singing through the house at six. At twelve, on a trip around the world with him, at eighteen, the belle of the season; for she should have all that money could buy. He would make it up to her if he lived. If he could only weather the ravages of age and a squandered life.

A soft step at his side aroused him. He

raised strained eyes to the nurse's anxious face. She leaned forward, asking quickly, "Did you order the plumber to work on this floor? He just stepped into Mary's room and backed out awkwardly when he came upon me."

"The plumber? No!" exclaimed Grandfather Craig, rising quickly. "There was something in the kitchen. I will ask Henry about it. He shouldn't be up here."

Craig hurried downstairs and hunted up his valet, who had become butler in the new house.

"Henry," he asked anxiously, "what is this about the plumber? There is nothing the matter upstairs, is there?"

"No, sir," answered the old servant. "He just said that while he was here he ought to have a look at the bathroom pipes. He has just gone out, sir."

"Please remember that no one must come upstairs," said Grandfather Craig.

The servant bowed as his master left the room and returned to the nursery.

"It is all right," he told Nurse. "I am glad you are so cautious."

"I would not want anything to happen while I am in charge," answered Nurse. "There has been so much publicity about your taking the child here and practically buying a house for her that, frankly, I am afraid."

"Afraid? Nonsense," said Grandfather

Craig uneasily. "There is a watchman on the street, and the lower windows and doors are barred."

"But the temptation," urged Nurse. "I am really nervous."

"Well, perhaps I had better get a detective." Craig stepped out of the room and across the hall into his library. For weeks he had worried. Now he would remove all doubt. He phoned an agency and asked for a good man who could guard the house in the guise of a servant.

When the detective came Craig gave him careful instructions. "You are to see everyone who enters, day or night. Under no circumstances must any workman or messenger be allowed on the second floor unless I am present. You have had experience in this sort of thing?"

"Yes, sir," answered the operative. "I have been in a good many kidnapping cases."

Craig winced at the word. "Of course, we don't expect anything of the kind here, but it is always well to be on guard."

"Certainly," agreed the detective. "There has been so much said in the papers about the child, speculations on her future as an heiress and things like that, that I suppose a good many crooks are more interested in this house at present than they really should be."

"I leave it entirely in your hands," answered Craig. "The servants are few and none are allowed on the nursery floor, except Henry, Miss Parkerson the nurse, and one maid to whom I will introduce you."

"You have confidence in these three?"

"Yes," answered Craig thoughtfully. "Two of them I have known for years, and the maid came to me well recommended."

The detective took his place in the household and all went smoothly for several weeks, Grandfather Craig spending much of his time in the chess room with an old crony or two, interrupting his game at every murmur from the nursery and tiptoeing to the door to make sure Mary was all right.

Then one evening, as Miss Parkerson returned from an airing, she spoke to him hesitantly about seeing two suspicious figures loitering across the street. "I thought it best to say something," she said nervously; adding with a shivery little laugh, "the responsibility seems to be getting on my nerves."

"You are quite right in mentioning it. I will speak to the man from the agency."

For several days after this slight scare vigilance was redoubled, and then at the moment of relaxation, when the watch dogs were nodding, the dreaded happened.

In the middle of the night Miss Parkerson

rushed into Grandfather Craig's bedroom and shook his thin shoulders. "Mary! Mary!" she cried. "The baby is gone."

Instantly awake, Grandfather Craig tottered to his feet and, throwing on a bath robe, rushed into the nursery. The blue bassinet was empty. His chilled, frightened fingers sought the pillow and the fleecy covers. They were cold to his touch. The baby had been gone for some time. Like an electric shock a trembling vibrated his frail old body. His face flashed an ashy gray, and a redness tightened the little lines about his startled eyes.

"Gone? My little baby gone? Oh, God! No, Nurse, you're only trying to scare me—come, tell me quick, the baby's all right in your bed—Why, she *must* be all right!"

"She's been stolen," wailed the nurse, "right from under our very eyes."

"Then you weren't watching? You let her out of your sight, and now she's gone."

"I was asleep," the nurse defended helplessly.

"You just woke up and missed her?" he exclaimed, turning his burning gaze on Miss Parkerson.

"Yes, something startled me. The unusual stillness of the room, I guess. I had given Mary a bottle at eleven-thirty." She glanced at the business-like watch pinned to her white

uniform. "Ordinarily she would have cried for another feeding before three, but you see it is nearly four now. I must have been awakened by missing her regular cry."

Grandfather Craig stood for a moment, gazing down at the empty crib. Then he passed a faltering hand over his eyes and pressed a button in the wall communicating with a bell in the room the detective occupied on the first floor.

"The blankets are gone, too, and the silk shawl that protected her head from draughts!" exclaimed Miss Parkerson.

"Too bad they did not steal you, too." Grandfather Craig ground his teeth and spoke with satirical bitterness.

"I don't know how it could have happened." The nurse wrung her hands in anguish. "My cot is not two feet from hers, and at the slightest sound I have always awakened."

"Over four hours," said Craig slowly. "That is a long start they have. I'll never get her back. I might have known I couldn't have a little girl." He stepped with bowed head toward the door as the detective, with loosened collar and rumpled hair, staggered sleepily into the room.

"Well, White, it has happened. I suppose you were asleep, too." Craig stared unseeingly at the operative.

"Yes, I am not expected to stay awake

twenty-four hours a day," the detective answered resentfully, turning to the crib. "She is gone?"

"Gone," murmured Miss Parkerson, pressing her hands together in a frenzy of nervousness.

"Well?" flung Craig, turning to the confused pair. "Do something!" He paced back and forth, hands clenched behind him, his head jutting forward, and eyes bulging.

Aroused to action, the detective rang for the servants and slipped out of the room to make an investigation in the lower part of the house. Miss Parkerson followed him, not knowing what to do and fearing to remain in the room with Craig.

When they returned the nursery was empty.

"Well?" came a quavering voice from the chess room. They turned with a guilty start toward one another and stepped into the unlighted chamber, where Craig sat with shaking shoulders hunched over a table, his white head on his outstretched arms.

"A kitchen window," announced the detective, "cut clean out. A clever mob it must have been."

"You say they came in through the kitchen?" Craig raised his head, his hollow, burning eyes glinting in a shaft of light from the nursery.

"Yes, they cut the pane out so they wouldn't hit any burglar alarm wires. Whoever did it knows his business." The detective seemed more interested in the neatness of the kidnapping than in the loss of the child.

"Well, do something," hissed Craig, raising his head again, his words darting out like venomous fangs. "Find the baby. The poor little thing will be hungry. They won't know what to feed her. She must have certified milk and the proper formula. Find her! Now!" The detective rushed from the room. Miss Parkerson tiptoed to the nursery to meet Henry, who had answered the servants' bell. While she was showing him the empty crib and struggling for words of explanation Craig tottered past toward his room. A moment later the sound of a falling body came to their ears. Together they rushed into the bedroom adjoining and found Grandfather Craig crumpled in a spent heap on the floor, his limbs twitching.

A doctor was sent for. The shock had shattered Craig's frail heart. He hung in the balance between life and death for days. Then science won over nature and he gradually recuperated. At first, to calm him and give medicine a chance, they said that the baby had been found. Then when Craig was strong enough to bear it the doctor told him the truth, reading

him a letter that had been in the possession of the police for three days:

DEER OLD CRAIG: Well we got her. It was a eazy job and their are other jobs just as eazy. She's been drinkin a lot of milk and with the high cost of liven we got a bill against you of just $200,000.

Now don't give this to the pelice. Just be sensable this once and get the money in $100 bills, tie it all up in a shoe box and giv it to a kid to deliver at S. H. Meibaum's shoe store, 614 Grand street, this city, at 9.30 Monday night, June 18th.

Don't you be nowhere near or you'll get your head bloed off. And don't you say nuthin to the pelice or you will never see little Mary anymore.

The minute we get the money you get the kid. That's all.

"Monday night," quavered Craig when he fully understood the message, "why, that's to-night."

"Yes," said the doctor soothingly, "but don't let it worry you. It's all been taken care of. The police have been watching Meibaum's store since the letter came to you and was turned over to them. They have the stage all set for to-night. Six detectives in Meibaum's store and four across the street, ready to spring out on the kidnapper's agent when he comes forward at 9:30 to take the shoe box from the boy's hand. The box is filled with sawdust and the whole thing is neatly arranged, so they are sure to get the kidnappers."

"But Mary?" asked Grandfather Craig

tremulously. "I would rather pay the money and make sure."

"I wouldn't have told you anything about it only you must be prepared and saved the shock of Mary's return; the police will get her back all right."

"God, they must! Oh, I hope they do," quavered Craig, his eyes closing and hands clenching in a fervid silent prayer. "But suppose they should slip up!"

The physician gave him a mild sleeping potion and smiled with satisfaction at the neatness with which he had prepared his patient against the shock of the baby's return.

When Craig awakened before dawn on Tuesday morning he asked feverishly for news of Mary. The doctor, who had been sitting at his bedside since midnight, moistened his lips to reply.

"Mary? Mary?" Craig repeated, receiving no answer.

"She's all right." The doctor forced a smile and tried to speak convincingly. "There is a little delay, but Mary will be brought back."

Craig caught the note of artificiality in the physician's voice and rose up in bed, crying: "Tell me the truth! Something has happened to her! I can see it! I can feel it! I am strong enough to stand the truth."

For an instant the doctor debated. Reach-

ing over, he took his patient's wrist and held his fingers lightly on the pulse as he spoke slowly. "The boy went with the box of sawdust at nine-thirty. The man who wrote the letter and was to meet him came out of a doorway and took the box. The officers in Meibaum's store sprang out, but the kidnapper had become frightened and started up the street at a run——"

"And he got away?" cried Craig hoarsely, his fingers gripping the counterpane.

"No, no," repeated the doctor quickly. "Just as he slipped away into an alley one of the policemen shot, and when they came up they found his body twitching in death."

"They killed him? Killed the kidnapper?" Craig tore his wrist from the doctor's fingers and clutched his coat lapels with both hands. "The fools! The fools!" he screamed. "Mary will never come back now. They've killed the man who knew where she was hidden. They killed him." He fell back onto the bed, his form stretched tensely, his eyes staring.

The physician worked over him anxiously, restoring suspended circulation; working frantically to recover the ground unexpectedly lost.

The thought of the blunder of the police preyed on Craig's mind. It weakened him. He failed daily, his brain giving way beneath the strain; and for weeks he lay muttering

about Mary and kidnappers and police and shoe boxes full of money.

Meanwhile no further word came from the kidnappers. If there were others in the plot besides the dead man they had evidently been frightened off by the killing. If there were no others, the secret of Mary's existence had gone to the grave with the unidentified man who had come to claim the money.

When it became certain that Craig could not rally, his remaining son, Richard, grew very solicitous concerning him and urged upon the doctor to get some information from the old man in one of his rational moments concerning a will. But Grandfather Craig was crafty until the last, when, by the mercy of Providence, his mind was restored for a few hours before his eyes were darkened by Death. Calling for a lawyer, he dictated a brief will, leaving everything to Mary and making a provision, at the earnest solicitation of his son, Richard, that if Mary were not found before she was twenty-one that his other grandchild, Henry, should inherit the estate.

He fell back on the bed after affixing his signature. The tense strain of the emotional moment had proved too much for his spent heart. Ten minutes later the doctor closed his death-glazed eyes, and Richard Craig and the lawyer tiptoed from the room.

CHAPTER II

FREE!

Moseses Island, in Chesapeake Bay, offers a snug harbor for catboats and oyster luggers. The island itself is no more than a town, and its people are fisher folk who work daily in the oyster beds; a rough, ready lot with the manners and morals of the sea coast. Hemmed in by water, the people of Moseses Island have grown within themselves, isolated from advanced civilization.

The needs of the town are supplied from Truscott, across the bay. The oystermen have formed a close corporation protecting each other's interests and refusing to accept newcomers. Strangers are unknown. When a man dies on Moseses Island his son succeeds to his catboat and sea boots and there is no noticeable change in the routine of work. When a baby is born the event is discussed at the Post Office. Occasionally there is a marriage which becomes a seven days wonder and then passes into the humdrum of uneventful life on Moseses Island. For sixty years the town has slumbered.

One summer in the early '90s, however, a mild sensation thrilled the inhabitants and set tongues wagging for months. A baby, not born on the island, had come to live there; a tiny four months babe, dainty, flower-like, different from the red bawling infants of the fisher folk. No one knew who brought the baby. It was supposed that Billy Peart went to Truscott and carried the child back in a basket. He gave out to the gossips that the baby, Mary he called her, was the daughter of his sister who had died and left him the child to bring up.

That was the first inkling anyone in the village had had that Billy Peart possessed a sister, dead or alive. His word did not go for much. He had been caught in shifty practices, stealing sails, sinking boats, and cheating in the count of oysters. The honest oystermen had pushed him out of the beds and, reluctant to leave the island on which he had been born, Billy Peart had turned to keeping a notion store, where he sold tobacco, illicit liquor and, in summer, ice cream and candy.

Within a month every woman in town, and most of the men, had seen little Mary and passed judgment on her.

"She's as different from us as a Bay 4 oyster from a mudder," was the decision of Cap'n Jogifer, a philosophic village father reputed to be a bit "queer."

Beyond saying that Mary was his niece, Billy Peart was silent concerning her. When asked if she was legally adopted, he answered that he was making arrangements to send her to a brother in the West, and that he did not expect the baby to be with him long. But in spite of his expectations Mary stayed, and there was much talk about Billy Peart's paying a hundred dollars cash for a share in an oyster boat a few days after the baby's arrival. Certainly there was something very suspicious in the whole affair, but gossip thrashed itself out on the island without ever reaching mainland.

Liza, Billy's good wife, took Mary to her ample bosom in prayerful thankfulness. She had been denied children and was glad of the boon of this one, no matter what her source.

Naturally, in two or three years the story had lost all its interest, and little Mary had taken her place as a child of the town, despite the fact that she was different. At first, Billy Peart had treated her with thoughtful care, as though she were a valuable possession; but as she grew into childhood he came to cuff her, snarl at her and complain about the quantity of food she ate. This change to the customary treatment of youngsters on Moseses Island went unnoticed.

At six, Mary, a brown, dreamy-eyed elf, was into all sorts of childish mischief, until Billy

Peart limited her scope by putting her to work in his store. She was tall enough to see above the counter and old enough to serve plates of ice cream without spilling. Her first summer at work was not relieved by much play, but when winter came and the customers who had loitered in the shop during the slack season were in the oyster beds, Mary had a little time to herself, in which she played alone, rigging up dolls and making friends of them.

Whenever opportunity offered she slipped down to Cap'n Jogifer's shack on the water's edge, where, with the old sailor's help, she fashioned a fish box into a stage. There, on many an afternoon, exciting dramas and simple comedies were enacted by the dolls.

Mary's fanciful imagination went without remark, except from Liza Peart, whom she called "Aunt," and Cap'n Jogifer, who was plain "Cap'n" to her. Liza was in sympathy with the child, and it was her boast that Mary was of gentle blood. She did not eat clumsily and noisily as the village children. In all that she did she showed innate refinement.

In Mary's seventh year Aunt Liza insisted that she be sent to the crude island school, but Billy Peart would not listen to it, because shoes were expensive, and she must pay her own way. Since there were no probation officers on Moseses Island, Mary would have been suffered to

remain ignorant and spend her days in dull slavery, had it not been for Cap'n Jogifer.

Afternoons, when Billy Peart went to Truscott or was off on business, Aunt Liza allowed Mary to slip down to Cap'n Jogifer's boat or shack. The Captain always greeted her heartily in his bluff seaman's way, his blue eyes twinkling above a crisp, crinkly white beard that nearly concealed his face. He told her stories, taught her the alphabet and numbers.

Mary's was a pleasant school, lying lazily in the bottom of Cap'n Jogifer's catboat, holding a sheet or sometimes the tiller, and repeating simple lessons after the Captain; a well-told yarn her reward for a lesson learned. Sometimes she stretched out for hours before the cheerful stove in the Captain's shack, reading to him from picture boks, in one syllable, which he bought on his monthly trips to Truscott.

This continued until Mary was nearly fourteen, when a sudden change came into her life as the result of a protracted trip of Billy Peart's. He came home smiling at the end of a week's sojourn, bought out an oysterman for five hundred dollars cash, and suddenly awoke to the fact that Mary's education had been neglected. He brought her two dresses and a pair of shoes from Truscott, and sent her to school next day. The village was mildly surprised by this sudden exhibition of conscience on the part

of Peart. People wondered where he had found the five hundred dollars, and if the money had any bearing on his change of heart.

Cap'n Jogifer was delighted when Mary came to him clad in new dress and shoes.

"Get all you can, my dear," he counseled. "I am thinking your Uncle Billy owes you a whole lot more than two new dresses and a pair of shoes in fourteen years."

Mary's appearance in school caused no sensation. She studied by herself as she had played by herself, and took little part in the games or activities. Released from much of her store drudgery, she spent more time with Cap'n Jogifer. They had long serious talks about her coming to Moseses Island, and about her mother.

"You're a different breed than most the mongrels 'round here," Cap'n Jogifer told her fondly. "I don't believe Billy Peart is any blood relation of yourn. Some day I'm thinkin' you'll find out who you are and what you are, and then things'll be different."

"But Aunt Liza always says he's my uncle, and that when mama died he brought me here in a basket. I've asked him lots about mama and he won't ever tell me a thing."

"'Course he won't," smiled Cap'n Jogifer. "It's 'cause he don't know nothin' about your mama."

"But do you think I'll always live here?

Won't I get on the train in Truscott some day and ride far, far away? And see something besides water and oysters for a while?" She fixed her luminous gaze on him, and spoke slowly.

"Of course you will," cried Cap'n Jogifer. "You weren't meant to live in this town. You've got to go where you can do something different; something worth while. It's all right for old codgers like me that have lived out their life, but it'll never satisfy you two minutes after you get to be a young woman."

"But I'm a young woman already," protested Mary. "I can sail a boat myself, and wash and iron and make a dress, and in two or three years I'll be through school, because you've taught me almost all they teach there."

"You'll need a lot more learnin' than that," smiled Cap'n Jogifer. "You'll need the schoolin' of life, and I think you'll get it."

Mary thrilled with the thought. "Do you know," she said, "lots of times I dream I won't always be here on Moseses Island. I think of railroad trains and big buildings like you've shown me pictures of. I wouldn't like to always live here, see nothing but water, and go to the post office and fill dishes with ice cream."

"I guess there ain't no chance of that," chuckled Cap'n Jogifer. "You'll be ridin' in

your own carriage some day, 'way away from here, if I'm any good at guessin'."

For nearly two years Mary was treated with consideration by Billy Peart. Then he gradually returned to his old ways and became a task-master, but he did not take her from school.

During Mary's eighteenth summer Billy Peart left Liza and Mary in charge of the store and went off for a ten-day trip. When he returned he was once more happy, bringing with him new dresses for Mary, and giving her a five dollar gold piece with much ceremony.

"You must begin to save a little money, Mary," he said, with a leer. "Tuck Wintergreen or one of the boys will be asking you to marry him one of these days, and you'll want to have something to bring him."

Mary blushed. The word marriage had no real significance to her. She did not think of her Aunt Liza and Billy Peart as really married, or any of the other island people. Marriage was a romantic dream she had vaguely conceived from reading sound novels Cap'n Jogifer had brought home for her. Marriage was something sweet, which life on Moseses Island did not suggest in any way. It belonged to a different land, a different life.

Clutching the five dollar gold piece, she went to her room and sat for hours with brimful eyes, staring at the new dresses and trying to realize.

The sudden shifts and fancies of Billy Peart were too much for her to puzzle out. Cap'n Jogifer had hinted that there was something dark behind the moods and trips of Billy Peart. Mary could not imagine what, but she burned to know.

At last, rousing herself from dreams, she considered the new clothes. The one dress that attracted her was made of good stout cloth and, thank goodness, was not showy, like the cheap prints that had come with it. She put it on slowly with the instinctive manner of a woman born to good clothes but denied them. The dress fell in graceful folds over her full, lithe young figure. She circled about, viewing the gown in a cracked, wavy mirror. To her tasteful eyes a bit of color was lacking at the throat. She caught up a treasured hair ribbon, pressed it out between her fingers and rapidly stitched it in, so a bright edge dressed and trimmed the rather unfinished product of a cheap shop. Her face bloomed from the dress above a full, curved throat, and she smiled a slow smile of satisfaction at her reflection. With sudden impulse she did up her hanging curls for the first time, coiling the luxurious golden mass in a fascinating coiffure, and holding it in place with a whole packet of pins Aunt Liza purloined from the shop.

With a glow of adventurous excitement in her

lustrous brown eyes, she tripped down to the water front to look up Cap'n Jogifer. The villagers gasped at Mary as though she were an apparition. Tuck Wintergreen, a lumbering six-footer, turned clear around and actually took off his dingy hat to her, prompted by some sort of shamefaced embarrassment.

"Golly, girl!" exclaimed Cap'n Jogifer, dropping his baling bucket as Mary ran down to his boat. "You've growed up over night."

Mary tossed her head gaily. "Now you can't say: '*When* you're a young woman, Miss Peart!'" she laughed musically, an affectionate smile quivering on her Cupid-curved lips as she viewed the Captain's astonishment.

"That name don't fit you," said Cap'n Jogifer. "Something more sounding ought to go with that get up. Mary Dangerfield! Somethin' out of a book."

"*Miss* Mary Dangerfield," she laughed, jumping down into his boat, regardless of her clothes. "Does the wind hold? Let's take a sail. I feel adventurous to-day. I want to get away from town, out—out to sea," she cried, looking up to find Tuck Wintergreen's hulking form leaning against the dock rail, his bloated red face grinning down at her.

"Can I come along?" he asked, with a conscious guffaw.

"No," said Cap'n Jogifer, loosening the

painter. "Two's company. Go back and talk things over with Billy Peart some more. Maybe he'll buy an interest in your boat, seein' he jest come home from one of them trips of his."

Tuck Wintergreen dodged back, his face mottling red with wrath.

"Ain't you afraid of gettin' your clothes all dirt?" said Cap'n Jogifer, as Mary took the tiller while he made sail.

"Clothes are to wear," answered Mary, turning her eyes toward the sea and gazing far away. Thoughts crowded her mind. She handled the tiller mechanically until they had cleared the harbor and were on a good tack. Then she turned sharply to Cap'n Jogifer. "What did you mean by Tuck talking things over more with Billy Peart?" she asked.

"Jest what I said," answered the honest Captain. "Ever since Billy come home this mornin' he's been hangin' around the wharf with Tuck, talkin' to him earnest. I heard a few words. I guess he's figurin' on marryin' you to Tuck. Somebody must want to get you married. He told Tuck there was a little money goin' with you. He told Tuck to come and see you to-night, too."

"Cap'n," said Mary softly, "I don't think I will be here to-night. I want to go away, far away. See! At last I have enough to take me." She held up the five dollar gold piece. "Since

I got this and the new clothes I've been doing a lot of thinking. I'd like to find out who I am, who my mother was. I don't belong here. I know it. I'm grown up. I must go away."

"Well, it's comin'," said Cap'n Jogifer with a faraway look, his manner so matter-of-fact that he might have been speaking about the breeze. "I'll miss you, Mary. But that won't keep me from tellin' you you ought to go. It wouldn't do for the likes of you to marry Tuck Wintergreen an' settle down here on Moseses Island. You couldn't stand it. You'd kill him. I know you."

"Yes," said Mary. "I think I'll go away from here. I know my own mind now. I know I've got to do something more in the world than just dish up ice cream."

"Of course you have. That's how you're different from the rest of us on the old island here," sighed the Captain. "I've seen it coming a long time." He made fast one of the sail ropes and moved nearer Mary. "Look here, Miss Mary Dangerfield," he said. "The world's a wicked place, but you're able to take care of yourself. You've allus been, since the time you steered this old tub in through the squall and weathered it. Now I'm going to tell you something. *I'm with you,*" he took a deep breath and settled back in the bow. "Whenever you make up your mind you just come to me and

I'll sail you to Truscott. I've been countin' on that day. It's my idea of progress."

"I knew you'd be with me," she said simply, her eyes fixed on a white yacht with shining brass and mahogany they were drawing near.

They passed under the bow of the expensive pleasure craft and caught sight of two girls and a man in yachting costume. Mary gazed at them wistfully, as the graceful boat skimmed along, past Moseses Island, to some city harbor.

She turned moist eyes toward Cap'n Jogifer a minute later.

"That's what you ought to be doin'," said the Captain. "That's your life by rights. I may not be as sharp at business as Billy Peart and some of the rest of them, but I can tell what's good for folks."

Mary beamed upon her faithful old companion through tearful eyes. She had never felt real affection for another soul on Moseses Island, except Aunt Liza.

Their short sail over, Mary returned to the store. Billy Peart had brought back a long-promised phonograph from Truscott to be used as a business stimulator during the dull, dreary winter. Mary had looked forward to the arrival of that phonograph as to a glimpse of heaven. Now she listened listlessly, her thoughts astray as she dropped into a chair and heard the rhythmic wail of the *Miserere*. Slowly the music

drifted into her thoughts; it stirred her, differently than the church choir, differently than the two tinkling pianos in the village. This music had in it the same human note that she had found in the chant of the fishermen as they rowed in through a storm. Mary glanced up and was conscious of quite a crowd in the room, with Billy Peart bustling around pompously. She realized vaguely the excitement of the assembled villagers, and felt the irritating presence of Tuck Wintergreen somewhere in the background.

She thought of going to her room. She felt like crying alone. But just then Billy Peart put on the record of "The Blue Danube," and she lingered to listen.

A mist filmed Mary's eyes as the music stole subtly through her. Her arms dropped limply to the table, she trembled with emotion. Her eyes closed, fanciful pictures dancing before them. She pictured herself as one of her dolls, long forgotten, in a ball dress, dancing in a brilliantly lighted room. She waltzed on into a garden of roses, lights twinkling in the blossoms; she smelled perfume, intoxicating perfume, and through rose-tree branches caught glimpses of a tinted future, all song, gladness and laughter.

Suddenly a heavy hand clapped down on her slumped shoulder. The dream was shattered.

It disappeared in a mad whirlpool as she looked up into the ardent eyes of Tuck Wintergreen.

"Makes you want to dance!" he bawled in a big, uncouth voice.

Mary shuddered, instantly picturing the rough, clumsy village dances she had witnessed but never attempted.

Tuck reached for her waist. She struggled to her feet and pushed him away. Playfully he lumbered forward, caught her in his arms and, with a great guffaw, kissed her.

Mary, tense in an instant, flung back from him. Her hand shot out. She delivered a stinging slap on his beefy cheek and whirled about, darting through the kitchen door, intending to go to her room. The back door was open. Blind with humiliation and anger, she rushed into the open and sped swiftly to the water's edge, where Cap'n Jogifer was making fast his boat for dinner.

"I want to go. *Now! Now!*" she cried to him, trying to calm herself by holding her burning cheeks tight in cold, trembling hands.

Cap'n Jogifer, a responsive light in his faithful old eyes, signaled for her to jump into the boat. He ducked into his shack as Mary leaped to the deck and deftly made sail.

"Hurry!" she called to him, as she made ready to cast off the painter.

A moment later the Captain appeared. He

took a rapid step toward the boat, turned and gave a short cry.

Mary looked. Down the lane from the store two men were running. She recognized the hulking form of Tuck Wintergreen and, behind him, Billy Peart.

"Quick, Cap'n!" cried Mary, jerking loose the painter and standing in the bow, ready to shove off.

"No! *I'll* keep 'em back. Sail her yourself," shouted the Captain. "Here's something!" He ran down to the wharf, flung Mary a knotted bandanna and pushed the boat off with a tremendous shove.

Too excited to cry good-by, he turned to meet the rush of Billy Peart and Tuck Wintergreen. Seizing a heavy, iron-headed boat pin, murderous rage in his usually mild eyes, Cap'n Jogifer swung at Tuck Wintergreen, striking him fairly in the stomach and knocking him off the pier. He turned to meet Billy Peart, but the cowardly storekeeper, profiting by the fate of Tuck Wintergreen, backed water, spending his wrath in vociferation.

Mary, stuffing the knotted bandanna into her waist with the handkerchief in which she had tied the precious five dollar gold piece, hoisted her sail, caught the breeze and pointed straight for Truscott.

As she looked back she saw Tuck Wintergreen

clamber out of the water, shake himself like a wet dog and join in the argument between the Captain and Billy Peart. A crowd collected; twice she saw Cap'n Jogifer's club flash above their heads, but no boat put out to overtake her.

Giving prayerful thanks for the protection of the Captain, Mary turned her attention to the town of Truscott, which she had almost reached. Sighting a boy on the pier, she threw him a rope, dropped sail and leaped ashore.

"Take this boat back to Cap'n Jogifer, please," she said to the wharf idler, and, waiting a moment to see him jump in and hoist the sails, Mary made straight for the railroad station, swinging along at a rapid gait, determined to get out of town before Billy Peart could elude the violent Captain and give chase.

She breathed deeply, her eyes shone with new brilliance, she thrilled with excitement, repeating over and over to herself, "*Free! Free! Free!*"

CHAPTER III

NEW YORK

THE screech of a railroad whistle startled Mary. She had sometimes heard the same whistle from the bay and occasionally had seen the puffing black iron monster dragging his tail of yellow coaches around a curve in the road. Now she was going to really ride in one of those yellow cars. She thrilled with a sense of freedom and excitement. The engine whistled again and Mary sped toward the sound, coming at last to a red depot which, to her simple eyes, was a commanding structure.

A teamster leaned against a truck on the platform. Mary hurried up to him.

"When does the train go?" she asked, in a glow of anticipation.

"Which way you goin', Ma'am?" asked the teamster, glancing at her bare head.

"Why, that way." Mary pointed up the track at random, fearing to disclose her ignorance.

"Two thirty-six," was the prompt answer. "Goin' North." He glanced at a dollar watch on a greasy leather chain. "You've got nearly

half an hour to wait." He jerked his thumb toward the station, and Mary, not knowing exactly what to do with her time, followed the motion and entered the ladies' waiting room.

She looked at the scattering of women in the room and suddenly realized that all wore hats. If she was to travel on the train, evidently she must have a hat. She wondered vaguely if the five dollar gold piece would provide that, as well as railroad fare and a few nights' lodging until she could find work in her new home, wherever that home was to be.

A little in doubt, she reached down into her waist to take out the handkerchief in which the coin was tied. Her fingers struck the bulkier bandanna Cap'n Jogifer had thrown her. She untied it quickly, removing a small packet wrapped in a white slip of paper. Her eyes scanned the familiar hand-writing of the Captain:

DEAR MARY:

I've been putting by a little for you from time to time. I ain't nobody else to save for. It ain't much, and don't you feel funny about taking it, because it's sort of pay for your company.

God bless you, girl, is the wish of yours truly,

CAPTAIN JOGIFER.

Her eyes filled as she read. For a moment she was homesick for the Captain. Then her gaze dropped to the enclosed packet she had been absently fingering. It was a compact roll

of money, fastened with a rubber band. Accustomed to handling small bills in the shop, Mary received a thrill on realizing that these were fives, and folded in the center was one ten.

Forty dollars in all, she counted rapidly. That, with her own five dollars, was a fortune. Touching the money gave her a sure sense of power. She glanced at the station clock. The best way she could give thanks to the faithful Captain was in getting away and making something of herself, as he wished.

There was still time to get a hat. She hurried from the waiting room with the money clutched tightly in her hand. Across the street was "Saltman's Emporium," where she had been once on a memorable shopping excursion with Aunt Liza.

Stepping in confidently, she walked through bewildering aisles of fresh crisp dress goods, stopping at last to ask the pompous proprietor, Mr. Saltman, himself, where the hats were.

The merchant smiled down at the shy country girl and led her to a display counter where a patronizing saleswoman waited on her.

"I suppose you want a reasonable-priced hat," suggested the saleswoman, looking Mary up and down, a little puzzled by her appearance.

"Why, I want something good," said Mary,

confused by the array of headgear to select from.

She tremblingly picked out a simple Panama and set it jauntily on her bronze coils of hair. The hat transformed her, adding just the needed touch. In that moment the saleswoman was certain of her customer's standing. Changing promptly to a manner almost servile, she asked, "Are you one of the young ladies from the yacht?"

Mary blushed beneath her tan. It was positively intoxicating to be mistaken for one of the vacation people she sometimes saw sailing in splendid yachts in the bay. She had never realized before what a difference dress made.

"How much is it?" she asked, disregarding the question and turning to select two hatpins from a display.

"Twelve dollars," answered the saleswoman, with pride in the exclusive choice of her customer.

The price took Mary's breath away, but she only changed color, and her hands did not tremble as she handed the ten dollar bill and a five to the woman.

Having received her change and purchased the hatpins, Mary started for the door, leaving Mr. Saltman and several clerks in blank surprise, for a twelve dollar hat was seldom sold in Truscott.

On her way out, Mary was attracted by a table heaped with purses. Suddenly realizing the need of a safe place to carry her money, she stopped and selected a trim black hand-bag which dressed her gown and added an elusive finish that gave her quite the air of a city girl.

Hearing the roar of an arriving train across the street, she rushed out of the shop and ran across just in time to be helped aboard by the conductor.

She dropped down breathless in a plush seat, thankful that so far she had escaped Billy Peart.

The train gave a jerk and heaved forward. Mary enjoyed the motion; the sense of getting somewhere. It was new to her, and she smiled to herself as she likened the jolting of the train to the slapping of Cap'n Jogifer's boat against the waves in a spanking breeze.

Nestling far down in the plush depths of the seat, Mary gazed out of the window. The whizzing telegraph poles and madly racing trees confused her, made her dizzy, yet she enjoyed the novelty.

She felt a serene sense of well-being, of comfort and security in being alone for once, out in the world by herself. That had been the dream of years, and now she was living it.

In open-eyed interest she forgot all about the new hand-bag containing her money, until it

slipped from her lap and fell to the floor. She stooped to pick it up and, as she raised her eyes, looked into the impersonal face of the conductor.

"Ticket, please," he said.

Mary hadn't thought of a ticket. She knew vaguely that tickets were required on trains, but had no idea of how or where they were purchased.

"I will buy one from you," she said to the conductor, opening her purse.

"All right, you can pay me. Where to?" the conductor mechanically drew out his rebate book.

"Why, where—" Mary paused in thought. "To the last station on the line," she answered.

"Do you know the name of it?" asked the conductor quizzically.

"Why, no. But that's where I'm going," she replied with certainty.

"I'll be back in a minute and fix you up," the conductor smiled and continued his ticket-taking round.

Mary's first encounter with the outside world had been disappointing. She realized that she should have settled on some destination before setting out so confidently; yet part of her pleasure was in not knowing. She had heard most of New York and hoped that the train would take her there. But Philadelphia was a famil-

iar name to her, and Baltimore; she didn't care much just which place she reached.

The conductor returned shortly and handed her a time-table, leaning over to point out a list of the stations.

"Maybe you can find the name of your town there," he suggested.

Mary ran her finger down the list to the very end. "Oh, *New York,*" she cried, coming upon the printed words.

"All right. That'll be four sixty-eight," he answered.

Mary handed out one of the five dollar bills. As long as they lasted she would give them freely; never having had money of her own, it seemed only miracle-making dream stuff, a skeleton key to open all locks.

The conductor gave her change and a receipt and started to move up the aisle, when a look of curious fatherly concern came into his experienced eyes and he paused to ask, "Have you ever been to New York before?"

"Why, no," admitted Mary.

"Friends will meet you there?" he asked.

"Why, no, not exactly," said Mary, shivering with a slight chill of dread as she noted the serious concern in the conductor's voice.

"Well, if you don't mind my saying it," the railroad man leaned over confidentially, "I

wouldn't speak to any strangers. Ask a policeman anything you want to know and either go to a good hotel or ask one of the women in uniform in the station for a good boarding house."

Mary's spirit of independence revolted. She had always taken care of herself on Moseses Island; she had no fear of New York; yet the kindly protective manner of the conductor prompted her to answer, "Thank you, I will remember it."

The conductor made another start, only to turn back suddenly. "You'll excuse my talking, but I had a daughter about your age. You're going to New York to work?"

"Yes," said Mary.

"May I ask what sort of work you are going to do?"

"Oh, anything," Mary answered brightly.

"Well, start a little slow, Girl," he suggested with a grave, kindly smile. "Don't go into a department store, or be a waitress or a stenographer, and keep away from employment agencies."

"Well, what shall I do then?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know," the conductor shrugged his shoulders. "It's a fierce game for a girl all alone. Go slow. Be careful. That's all."

He passed on and Mary turned abruptly to the window, forgetting his advice in the pleas-

ures of the whirling road-side. The train whizzed into a big city and came to a stop. Mary's eyes opened wide to take in the tall buildings, the crowd of people on the platform and the confusing stream of carriages, wagons and automobiles on a nearby street. She was tempted to get off. This must be New York.

But as she moved toward the door a brakeman called "Philadelphia," and Mary returned to the window to stare at the confused tangle of tracks, porters and passengers. She could hardly realize that New York was even a greater city than this, with more people in it.

As the train drew out of the station she looked back at the massive stone buildings gleaming in the sun and wondered that men had really built such mountain-like monuments. It was all beyond her comprehension.

A little later the conductor passed on one of his trips through the train. Mary gave him a timid, friendly smile. Having seen Philadelphia, she began to appreciate his advice. So many people and strange things were alarming.

"A little over an hour now and we'll be in New York," said the conductor with an answering smile. "Don't try to see it all at once, it's a big place."

"Oh, I'll take a day to do it anyway," Mary laughed in reply.

His words relieved her slight anxiety that the

train would not reach New York before dark. She wouldn't feel so much alone in daylight. As she turned to the window again she saw the sun nearing the horizon; it cast a soft, romantic glow over the world, and the houses and barns that flew past began to look like monstrous birds winging their way homeward at dusk, like the sea birds she knew so intimately.

It was already twilight when the train shot into a long black tunnel and the bustle of passengers announced its arrival in New York.

Mary picked up her hand-bag, which had been lying neglected on the seat beside her, and made ready to get off. Everyone else had voluminous baggage, but Mary, unaccustomed to a traveling bag, did not feel the lack of it. She did wish for a moment that she had brought a night-gown, but that could be easily purchased.

The train came out of the tunnel into a brightly lighted station and Mary moved toward the door with the others. When she got off she wandered with the crowd through a big iron gate and came out bewildered in the spacious main waiting room of the Pennsylvania station.

Instinctively she gazed up at the beautiful mosaic ceiling, a man-made sky that held her in speechless awe. She marveled at the massive columns, recalling the description of a castle she had read in a novel filled with gallant knights and gay ladies.

She looked at the people hurrying about her in all directions. They were all neatly dressed, like the men and women she had seen on yachts in the bay. Her dress must be out of place, she felt; but her hat was like many others; she found satisfaction in that as she mingled with the bustling New Yorkers and mounted a long, easy flight of marble steps.

At last she was in the street, looking up at the amazing row of arc lights, ranged majestically at the entrance.

Street cars and automobiles whizzed past. Hesitating about crossing the street, Mary sauntered down Seventh Avenue, marveling at everything. Reaching Twenty-third Street at last, she looked cross-town and made out through the evening dusk a hazy tower topped with a brilliant white light.

"The Metropolitan Tower," Mary breathed to herself. Recognizing the giant of commerce from a picture she had seen in a magazine, gave her assurance. That shining light seemed like a friend, though it must be a star. Catching her breath and holding it, she made a frantic dash across the street, ignoring the protection of a crossing policeman, and headed straight for the tower light, like a moth toward a flame.

She gazed into the store windows as she walked along, keeping close to them to avoid the home-rushing crowd, and unconsciously hurry-

ing her steps. The elevated road puzzled her when she passed beneath it, with a train roaring overhead. Everything seemed strange, as though she were walking in a dream.

Coming at length to Madison Square, Mary dropped down on a park bench to bask in the myriad lights, to wonder at the uprearing Flat-iron Building and gasp at the height of the Metropolitan, with its little lights twinkling from high windows which must house fairies.

Dazzled by it all, she rested happily on the bench, her hand-bag on the seat beside her, her thoughts in the clouds.

She tried vainly to separate the street sounds; bells clanged, teamsters shouted, autos tooted and screamed, newsboys yelled, and all to the rumbling accompaniment of rushing feet. Mary did not know that she had reached New York at its home-going hour; she wondered where all the people were bound and why so few made use of the winding rows of iron-armed benches.

A paper boy came running along, crying a baseball extra. Mary thought of newspapers she had read at Cap'n Jogifer's shack. She recalled the interesting advertisements they contained. Suddenly it occurred to her that she must buy a paper and find a boarding house among the advertisements.

She stopped the boy and bought a paper, re-

placing her hand-bag on the seat beside her as she spread out the wide sheet and studied the "Board and Room" column in the light of the arc.

Coming upon an attractive item and realizing that she would have plenty of time to sit and dream in the park after securing lodgings, Mary held her finger on the advertisement and looked about for a policeman. She would follow the conductor's advice and speak to no one else until she learned the city's ways.

A blue-coated officer stood at the end of her row of benches. He turned to saunter on just as Mary distinguished him from the moving throng. She jumped to her feet and ran to him, holding out the paper, and asking to be directed to the address.

"That's way up in the Bronx," said the officer, reading the advertisement. "Why don't you look nearer here? There's lots of good places between here and Third Avenue on Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Streets. But some of 'em hold you up. What price did you want to pay?"

At the mention of money Mary felt a vague sense of loss. She looked down at her hands. They were empty.

"Why, my purse!" she cried, glancing back toward the bench as she suddenly remembered leaving her hand-bag on the seat beside

her. "Wait a minute till I get it," she said. "Somebody might pick it up and not be able to find out who it belonged to."

"You left it on the bench there?" The policeman's eyes opened in surprise. "Why, there ain't one chance in ten thousand it's still there. You ought to be more careful." He walked by her side as she hurried back. "How much was there in it?"

"About twenty-five dollars," answered Mary.

"That's a goner, all right," said the officer, increasing his pace and glancing sharply at the park loiterers, who were few at that hour.

"Here is where I was sitting," said Mary, stopping short before a bench occupied by a very blonde woman who blushed and moved one hand suspiciously behind her as she started to rise.

"Just a moment, there!" called the policeman, looking straight at the blonde. "Did you see a purse on the bench here just now?"

"A purse?" asked the city woman blankly. "Why, no. Did you lose one?" she turned suavely to Mary.

"Yes. She dropped it here a minute ago. Sure you didn't see it?" The policeman scrutinized her closely.

"Why, no," she answered, backing away uneasily. "I certainly would have seen it if she dropped it around here." A look of affected

concern came into her eyes. "I remember seeing her. She just sat down as I got up. You're sure it was here you left it?"

"Yes," said Mary quietly, feeling in an intuitive flash that this strangely sophisticated woman had found her purse, but not knowing just how to act.

"Did you look behind the bench?" suggested the woman quickly, bending down to divert their attention for a moment.

The policeman was not fooled by the ruse. He watched closely while Mary bent with the woman to look behind the bench. A sudden movement of the woman's hand beneath her coat confirmed his suspicions. He reached out and jerked her arm sharply.

Mary's purse fell to the pavement. The woman swooped down and picked it up, her eyes glinting as she turned to face the policeman squarely. "That's mine!" she cried.

She turned to Mary with a beseeching look in her hunted eyes. Sister spoke to sister without a word. Mary understood. The woman's look was a frantic appeal to her sense of sportsmanship. She was throwing herself upon Mary's protection.

"This is your purse," said the officer, wrenching it from the woman's hand to return it to Mary.

For an instant Mary wavered. It was all the

money she had in the world. The woman appealed to her again with her eyes. Selfishly, Mary should take her purse at once, but her hand hesitated. The woman's look promised restitution.

"It's you for the lock-up," the policeman snapped, twisting the woman's arm cruelly and extending the purse to Mary.

A vision of the iron-barred jail on Moseses Island, where an occasional drunkard was locked up, flitted through Mary's mind. She could not be the cause of anyone's confinement in such a place. Mary dropped her eyes in a pretended inspection of the purse.

"No, that's not mine," she said with a conscious effort, keeping her eyes averted. "Mine was brown."

She heard a distinct sigh of relief from the woman as the officer returned the purse and released her.

CHAPTER IV

MARY IN WONDERLAND

When the policeman finally left Mary, convinced that she was either a clever faker or a simple country girl who had really lost her purse, Mary started out at once across the park in the direction the woman had taken.

She was certain that at some corner at a safe distance from the policeman the light-haired woman with the interesting old-young face would be awaiting her, ready to restore the pocketbook. She had read that much in her eyes. The woman had picked up her purse without knowing whose it was or meaning to steal it, she felt sure. Then she had lied to the policeman in the excitement of the moment and appealed to Mary for help when the purse was discovered. Mary was only too glad to have been of assistance.

But as the incident repeated itself in her mind she began to wonder more and more why she did not come upon the woman. She had followed in the right direction, walking slowly and looking at everyone who passed. Of course it was night already, but the sidewalks were

brightly lighted. Like Alice in Wonderland, she passed on from one surprising sensation to another. The lights thrilled her, lured her, fascinated her. Without realizing it, she had gone many blocks from the park, turning wherever fancy led, until a prodding thought of the lost purse made her turn back in a panic to find the woman, recover her money and make some provision for the night.

But the park evaded her. She was completely turned around and looked continually in the wrong direction for the light of the Metropolitan tower. At last she came out on Forty-second Street and Broadway and stood amazed before the myriad lights. She looked for a policeman, to ask direction to the Tower, but there was none in sight.

Walking slowly across Forty-second Street, Mary came to Fifth Avenue and, looking downtown, saw the light which marked Madison Square. She tried to hurry toward it, but her feet lagged. The excitement of the day began to tell upon her; her feet were heavy and walking became tedious.

At last she saw the open doors of a church and stepped in to snatch a moment's rest. Dropping down in a darkened pew in the rear, her taut muscles and nerves relaxed in the reverberating rhythm of a sacred song an organist was practicing in the front of the

church. Her hands stole out caressingly along the soft velvet cushions. She breathed a prayer of thankfulness and then, after a few minutes, felt rested enough to continue her walk.

Slipping out into the street, she hurried on toward the light. There were more people in the park than had been there at dinner time. Mary quickly located the bench where she had been sitting and was just scanning the faces of those nearby when she felt a tug at her sleeve.

She turned to look into the artificially bright eyes of Daisy Meade, the woman who had found her pocketbook.

"I was just leaving," exclaimed Daisy. "I've been waiting for you over an hour."

Mary gasped in thankfulness. "I got lost," she stammered. "I knew you would be here and I am sorry to have kept you waiting."

Daisy Meade glanced at her shrewdly. "What made you think I'd be waiting, dearie? Most folks would of walked off with those twenty-five simoleons, but I couldn't do it after you showed yourself a good sport. I've been waiting to eat. Are you hungry, dearie?"

"Why, yes," said Mary. "I didn't realize how hungry I was till you mentioned it. I haven't had a thing since breakfast."

"Well, we'll go right over to Child's here and get the best there is. I'll have to borrow

from you, but it'll be all right. I'm expecting an engagement any day now."

They crossed to a clean white lunch room and ordered a satisfying meal. Over the table Mary listened to Daisy Meade's story. It seemed that she had dropped down in Madison Square Park that afternoon, very tired and disappointed after a weary round of theatrical agents' offices. She explained to Mary that an actress of her personality and figure should have no trouble getting an engagement at this time of year, but she had failed to take her rabbit's foot along for once.

Delving into ancient history, Daisy Meade revealed the fact that she had not had an engagement all summer, and that that morning her landlady had said very plainly that six weeks' credit was enough and Miss Meade would have to go out, leaving her trunk for security, that very night, if a payment were not forthcoming.

"So you see, dearie," said Daisy, "I was right up against the real thing when I sat down on the bench and saw your pocketbook, and you walking away. It took me a couple of minutes to make up my mind, but finally I reached over and got it. Maybe it wasn't some shock to find it full of real money. Then you came back with the cop, and before I knew it I had stuck the thing under my coat and said I hadn't found it. I am not a crook, nor ever

was one, but there are some temptations that just can't be resisted."

"I know," said Mary feelingly. "I was just as afraid of the policeman as you were."

"Then we're quits." Daisy Meade extended her right hand in good fellowship. Mary clasped it, glad to have found a reliable friend in New York so soon. She sketched her own story to the actress, and before the meal was finished, they had agreed to return to Daisy's boarding house together and share Mary's money until both found work.

"Something's sure to turn up, dearie," said Daisy Meade, squeezing her companion's arm, as they walked toward her lodging. "This partnership is the beginning of good luck for both of us."

"I certainly hope so," answered Mary. "I must find some sort of work, but I haven't the least notion what it will be."

"You'd make a good ingénue with a show, with those big innocent eyes of yours," said Daisy Meade, a slightly wistful tinge in her tone.

The thought of the stage was alluring to Mary, though she was a little shocked on finding that a real actress was such an ordinary sort of mortal after all. Yet there was a fascination about the big blonde theatrical woman that attracted her strangely. She was glad of

the opportunity to share her room and learn life from her lexicon.

When they reached Daisy Meade's lodging on a quiet street in the West Thirties, Mary was ushered into a pleasant little room on the third floor back; there she sat on the bed, thankful to have found some sort of a home so soon, while Daisy went down to pay the eager landlady five dollars on account and arrange about an extra cot for Mary.

She returned beaming, a heavy load off her shoulders, for at last the landlady was appeased. Mary made up her cot with fresh linen and went to sleep under the sisterly protection of world-wise Miss Meade.

In the morning both were up early, and after a good breakfast began making the rounds of theatrical offices. Plunged into a totally new life, Mary managed to conceal her ignorance by keeping her mouth closed and her ears and eyes wide open.

She felt uncomfortably conscious that everyone was staring at her in the first agent's office they entered. As a matter of fact the appearance of a girl so fresh and captivating was a decided sensation in the Rialto agency. Old actors, lined against the wall with peroxide blondes and eyebrow penciled brunettes, stared in wonder as the familiar figure of Daisy Meade appeared in company with the beautiful, lithe

girl. They made room for Mary; one old Hamlet, who had come early to get a seat in the crowded office, arose and proffered her his chair in a coveted position near the manager's door. The courtesy was unprecedented in that little-known world where men and women have struggled on equal footing since the time of Shakespeare.

But in spite of her breezy personality and captivating presence, Mary did not find employment when she and Daisy were at last admitted to the manager's office. Probably the prejudice against her companion in that office argued with more weight than Mary's inexperience.

On learning there was no work to be had, Daisy Meade conducted Mary through a maze of theatrical employment offices, only to receive rebuff after rebuff.

At luncheon, she exclaimed, "I can't understand it, dearie. It's September; just the time to get an engagement. Last year I got on with a road show at a hundred a week, but this year there doesn't seem to be much doing. Did you see all of 'em lamping you, though? Anybody'd think you was a Princess, or French, the way you got across." There was a suggestion of jealousy in her voice.

Mary did not know that by "lamping" Miss Meade meant that everyone had looked at her with envy and appreciation; she did feel

vaguely conscious, however, that Daisy closely resembled all the other women they had seen and that no one had wasted much time on her. One old actor had spoken to Mary while Daisy was talking with a manager and had suggested that probably Mary could find work quicker if she went alone. But Mary was loyal to her new-found friend and refused to entertain the suggestion.

"Never mind, dearie," Miss Meade encouraged as they started out again after luncheon. "I've got a friend, Manager Jackson, who'll turn up with some kind of a part for me one of these days, and I'll work you in. See if I don't."

All afternoon they climbed stairs and stood in waiting rooms, but no work came their way. "Nothing to-day," was the invariable answer, and its repetition became disheartening.

"Luck is always just around the corner, dearie," said Miss Meade as they started home that night. "It's been playing a great old game of tag with me, but I'm going to catch up. See if I don't."

Her optimism was refreshing, and it did not flag during the following days in which they repeated the wearisome round.

Then, just as Mary's money was giving out, Luck bobbed up its pert head unexpectedly.

On returning home, foot-sore and weary after

their fifth fruitless day of searching, Daisy found a letter on her dresser. She tore it open eagerly and read:

MY DEAR MISS MEADE:
Kindly call at my office to-morrow at ten in regard to part of the Daisy Maid in "The Society Queen."

Very truly yours,
L. H. JACKSON.

"Jackson!" she cried, shaking the letter before Mary's startled eyes and hugging her in an exuberant embrace. "I told you he would save the ship. I'm to get the part of the Daisy Maid; rural comedy, I suppose, and I'll work you in as my understudy. See if I don't!"

Mary had kept her hopes fixed on a rosy future. The delay had been exasperating, but she had not given in to despondency. The newness of everything kept her at a high pitch of happy and buoyant excitement.

"You and I will be on Easy Street to-morrow, dearie. It'll be *pâté de fois gras* and brussels sprouts for us from now on." Daisy Meade executed a neat, professional dance step and swung Mary around in a mad dance of celebration.

"I'll make that manager take me as your understudy," cried Mary spiritedly, her cheeks flushed with happiness. "I suppose the folks back on Moseses Island would never approve of

my being an actress. But it looks like life to me, and nowadays it's as much of a business as being a stenographer or a clerk, isn't it, Daisy?"

"Of course it is, dearie," answered the other. "Only it's a whole lot harder work." She spoke from a fund of experience. "You'll toddle along with me to-morrow and I'll land you in the chorus and get you five or ten a week extra to understudy me."

"It seems funny," cried Mary, with a shiver of delight, "I always wanted to be an actress. I used to make my dolls play in a little theater Cap'n Jogifer made for me out of an old box. It was lots of fun, and the real thing will be even better."

"That's the way to talk," smiled Daisy. "If you stick to that and make work play, before long you may take my job away from me. Who knows?"

"I wouldn't want to do that," said Mary with a droll little smile tinged with seriousness. "But I guess there will be plenty of room for both of us on the stage."

"Plenty," agreed Daisy Meade. She turned to her wardrobe and began patching a dress put by against the day of an engagement. Holding it up, she exclaimed, "I'll just trail into Mr. Jackson's office in this to-morrow and he'll fall hard for my looks. *Looks,* dearie, that's the

cue to your part in this business—and you've got plenty of those. Dress the part, look the part, and you'll get across—big."

"I ought to have a fresh waist," said Mary, taking stock of her clothes, which had suffered somewhat from a week's continuous wear.

"I owe you fifteen dollars." Daisy Meade jumped up with snapping eyes and reached for Jackson's note. "I can borrow ten from the landlady on the strength of this and we'll go out and get something to-night so you'll make as good an appearance as me to-morrow." Daisy slipped out of the room and returned in a few minutes with eight dollars, all the landlady had.

She took Mary to several small theatrical shops in the neighborhood and they picked up some attractive odds and ends. Daisy's taste was for loud and grotesque patterns, but Mary tempered it diplomatically, managing to make out a costume for the next day which, while very simple, was striking.

"You never can tell what you can do with only a little bit of money until you try," remarked Daisy Meade as they worked together mending a damaged neck-piece in their room that night, to have it ready for the morning triumph.

Mary slept but little, having so much to think

about and dream of; but in the morning she rose early, as fresh as a flower, and dressed with painstaking taste and care.

Long before ten o'clock she left for Jackson's office with Daisy. There she took a chair quietly in a corner among the early comers, while Miss Meade presented her card and asked for an audience in an imperious tone. A moment later Daisy was admitted to Jackson's private office, and after a word with him turned in the doorway, beckoning Mary to follow. She stepped confidently into the office and took a seat at one side while Daisy read over her new part and repeated some of the lines aloud for the benefit of Mr. Jackson and a sombre-eyed young fellow in faultless attire, who seemed to be a disinterested friend and gave most of his attention to Mary, though each avoided the other's gaze.

"That's all right, Miss Meade. You'll do," exclaimed Jackson abruptly, turning to the young man at his side, who nodded in corroboration. "She's all right. Eh, Mr. Willis?"

"Very good," replied the friend absently, his gaze drifting toward Mary.

Mary sat looking down demurely at her shoes. She was thoroughly conscious of young Willis's interest, but it did not annoy her, as the attentions of some of the men she had met in managers' offices had. He seemed to understand her,

and she was surprised to find that she liked him on sight. Most men were merely men to her, but Willis seemed different. His quiet, reserved manner appealed to her; she liked the soft sound of his voice. His eyes were direct, straightforward and good. He seemed utterly different from the showy crowd she had seen in the only side of New York life that had come to her notice.

While Mary was occupied with her thoughts, Daisy was carrying on a boisterous, enthusiastic conversation with the manager. Finally she adroitly secured a week's salary in advance (Mary was surprised that in spite of Daisy's talk she had signed a contract for seventy-five dollars a week), and then she spoke of Mary.

"I would like to have Miss Dangerfield understudy me," she suggested. "You can find a place for her in the chorus, can't you, Mr. Jackson?"

"We're nearly filled up," said Jackson, turning a critical eye on Mary.

Mary's heart sank. She glanced up at Mr. Willis. He leaned forward suddenly and said in a soft voice that always attracted and commanded attention, "I think you will need a girl of Miss Dangerfield's type, Jackson."

"Oh, all right," laughed the manager. "Whatever you say goes, Mr. Willis." He

turned to Mary, asking abruptly, "Had experience in this line?"

"No," she confessed, "but I know I can make good."

Her confidence was compelling. Willis's eyes snapped in appreciation.

"It seems to me," he said, "that Miss Dangerfield is quite the sort we want. Professionals are always a bit jaded," he bowed to Daisy Meade as though excepting her from his generalization. "If Miss Dangerfield has made up her mind to go on the stage, I certainly think she is the sort that will put our show in the front ranks."

Jackson twisted a big diamond ring on his fat finger and smiled amply. It was evident that the word of the quiet, self-possessed young man went far with him.

"You'll have a hard job trying to uplift the stage, Mr. Willis," he said finally. "But it's your money that's being spent."

"Experience don't matter," put in Daisy. "She's a born actress, that girl. I knew it the first time I met her." Daisy blushed slightly beneath her rouge as she recalled the pocketbook incident. "You can rely on her to play her part, no matter how difficult it is."

The manager glanced shrewdly at Mary. Evidently her modest, trim costume did not inspire confidence. He was a bit disconcerted by her

ingenous gaze; decidedly, she was not the sort to which he was accustomed.

"I guess you're right, Miss Meade," he said, his eyes fixed on Mary's beautiful luxuriant bronze hair. "She'll do fine in that schoolgirl scene, with her hair in braids. *She* won't need a wig."

"If we could scrape up a small speaking part to start with," suggested Willis. "I think Miss Dangerfield is quite above the type of show-girl."

"Now you're talking," declared Daisy.

"Let's not go too fast. That's the trouble with you young fellows who dip into this business," said Jackson with a toothy grin of conciliation. He took out a notebook. "We'll say, Miss Mary Dangerfield, booked as show-girl, with five extra to understudy Miss Meade. Making it twenty-five a week. Is that agreeable?" He turned his showy smile on Mary.

"Yes, thank you," she said, nodding her head to Mr. Willis instead of the manager, and smiling faintly, a glow of success heightening her color.

"Rehearsal to-morrow at ten, sharp!" exclaimed Jackson, slapping his notebook shut, with a curt nod of dismissal.

Daisy started for the door. Mary hung back. She wanted to thank Mr. Willis for the position. She felt grateful to him for his mild insistence

and sought some way to express her gratitude. But Daisy, knowing the danger of lingering after signing a good contract, tugged at her sleeve, and Mary left, but not before she had thanked Willis with her eyes and received an answering look from him.

CHAPTER V

ON THE STAGE

"WELL," breathed Daisy when they reached the street, "we own New York now. You with twenty-five and me with seventy-five." She squeezed Mary's hand exultingly. "I said I'd put you across, and I did. Now I'll make you into a star. See if I don't!" She interrupted her enthusiastic flow with the caution, "By the way, don't tell anybody I'm getting seventy-five. Say a hundred. It sounds better and it's sort of *noblesse obleege* of the business, see!" She lowered her voice to a whisper, "And you might say you're getting thirty-five without stretching it much."

Mary smiled to herself at the childish simplicity of Daisy's mind. Certainly her imagination was well developed. To avoid further discussion of salary, Mary replied, "I wouldn't be getting anything at all if it hadn't been for Mr. Willis."

"And *me*," Daisy reminded her emphatically.

"Of course, you too," agreed Mary. "But I mean, that man Jackson didn't seem enthu-

siastic about hiring me, and I didn't like him at all."

"Then you did like Willis?" asked Daisy with a sly grin.

"Why, yes, I did," Mary answered with characteristic frankness.

"Good for you, Girl! You certainly are the one for saying all you mean."

"Why shouldn't I?" asked Mary. "He's different from the others."

"That's it. Why shouldn't you?" repeated Daisy appreciatively. Then, after a pause, "You bet he's different from the others—*he's a millionaire.*" Her eyes widened as she sprung the surprise.

"A millionaire—" repeated Mary, startled for a moment; then with a quick smile, "Well, that doesn't matter."

"It does too matter!" exclaimed Daisy. "That's why Jackson bows down to him. Willis is backing the show; just for fun. He may lose a lot in it, but a lot is only a little to him. He's got all sorts of ideas about uplifting the stage; he's just the sort for you to start with. He picks a clean company and Jackson stands for it because he's got the money."

"I like him all the better now," said Mary simply.

Daisy laughed heartily; to her sophisticated mind the delicacy of Mary's fresh girlhood was

amusing, but she respected it and sheltered her charge as only a woman who has lived in the world can shelter a sister all unsuspecting.

"Well," Daisy said, when they had reached their room, "I'm going to square off the seven dollars I owe you, pay the landlady twenty, and then we'll have nearly fifty left to keep us a week, so everything's all right."

"I'm going to save fifteen out of my twenty-five every week," said Mary with determination.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," laughed Daisy. "Easy come, easy go; that's my motto, even if I do work hard for it. Now let's have a little private rehearsal." Daisy put Mary's light cot on top of her bed and pointed to the dresser in the middle of the small room.

"That's the center of the stage," she said, "and you've got to learn how to walk across the boards, like this." Daisy daintily lifted her skirt and swished it back and forth as she swayed across, before imaginary foot-lights. "Watch how I hold my hands and use my feet." She repeated her entrance and then sat on the bed to make room for Mary.

Mary walked slowly and confidently to the dresser, bowing low to Daisy, without imitating any of her preceptor's extravagant mannerisms.

"Fine!" cried Daisy. "You're a born ingénue. All you've got to do to make a hit is just walk on." She removed the rubber band from

a roll of blue paper covered "lines" and began reading her part. Mary repeated the lines after her in a clear, ringing voice sounding subtly pleasant after Miss Meade's harsh, artificial rendering of the part.

"Daisy Maid" in the play was a simple, starry-eyed country girl who had come to win her way in the city. Mary fell into the part easily, acting naturally.

"Don't let Jackson or Willis see you take my part," said Daisy Meade after three hours of rehearsal in their room; "I might lose my job; though of course you'll probably get stage-struck and lose your presence entirely on the boards."

"Yes, probably," agreed Mary with a catch in her voice. "But I don't think that would happen more than once."

Daisy wanted to go out to eat, but Mary's restless energy had found an outlet of expression at last and she insisted on spending another hour in reading and learning the part.

"I wish I could play Daisy Maid," she said wistfully at their early supper. "But then," her eyes brightened, "it will be great fun to be on the stage with real actors, anyway."

"Oh, you've got to work in the chorus two or three years," smiled Daisy, with the characteristic conceit of the profession. "It may look easy to read your lines the way I do, but be-

lieve me, dearie, it takes years and years of experience."

"Do you think I'll get a chance to take your place any night?" mused Mary.

"Sure, if I get sick. But I'm strong as a horse," answered Daisy. "Still, you never can tell."

Next morning, at rehearsal, Mary followed every word and action of Daisy's. Instinctively she objected to Daisy's overplaying of the part, but in her inexperience she felt that must be the real art of the stage.

She saw Mr. Willis standing silently in one of the exits. He smiled to her encouragingly as she went through her part with the chorus, and that smile made Mary do her best. Her work was simple; she had only a few lines to learn, which she repeated in unison with seven other show-girls. But in the rowboat scene she had a chance to distinguish herself. Seated in a pasteboard imitation boat with the chorus, she gave a very realistic imitation of rowing which attracted the stage director's attention.

"You know how to use the oars, don't you?" he exclaimed, picking Mary out of the eight to occupy the front seat in the pasteboard craft.

"That's good," he said, turning to the others. "Now you all watch how this girl moves her arms, and do the same. It looks like real rowing. It's a sure hit."

Mary blushed as she glanced into the wings and saw Willis gazing at her with pride. For half an hour she went through the pretense of rowing while the other girls copied her motions. Then the company was released for the day.

For nearly a week the same work was repeated each morning until the cast was perfect. Occasionally Mary saw Mr. Willis and they exchanged a few words. She liked him better every day. He was so different from the coarse manager, the voluble director and the dissipated looking actors. Mary rehearsed for his eyes, and found pleasure in it.

During the week she saw less of Daisy, who, with success, had picked up old friends and returned to old haunts of pleasure.

After one of the last dress rehearsals Daisy confessed herself a little tired and rode home with Mary. "You're making good, dearie," she confided. "Jackson was speaking about you just last night at a little supper he gave to the principals."

"Was Mr. Willis there? Did he say anything?" asked Mary quickly.

"No, Willis don't mingle with the mob much. He's not a good mixer. He keeps to himself mostly," answered Daisy. "Don't go getting a crush on him, dearie; he's a millionaire. Hands off."

Mary blushed and dropped her eyes. Daisy's bombastic manner was sometimes irritating, her materialistic viewpoint annoying.

"I believe I know every word of your part," said Mary, to change the subject, "just from watching you and listening to you."

"That's good," answered Daisy, without enthusiasm. "You're all right as an understudy, but you've got plenty of business to tend to in your own part. Just stick to that, dearie; I'll take care of mine."

Mary was hurt that Daisy chose to misunderstand her. It was not the first flare of jealousy she had overlooked for the sake of friendship. During the following days she carefully avoided the subject of "The Daisy Maid," but she could not help following the character with which she felt such close, intimate sympathy.

In one scene particularly Daisy's portrayal of the simple country girl seemed inconsistent to Mary. After the leading man made love lightly to "The Daisy Maid" she started an exciting chase, over a hedge, dodging behind trees and climbing fences, to elude her lover, who finally captured her and joined in a song, "What Do the Daisies Say?" Daisy Meade played that part too consciously, displaying too much sophistication, luring her lover on by artificial, stagey looks and actions, displaying none of the tomboy abandon of a country girl.

Mary wanted to speak to her about it. She wanted to show her how a country girl would really run away, for she knew. Alone in her room she practiced the chase, using the cot and bed for fences, but could never summon courage to present her criticism to Daisy.

Toward the last the rehearsals had become distasteful. Mary longed to appear before people on a brilliantly lighted stage, instead of playing to depressing rows of empty seats on a bare, half-lighted stage amid the shouting of directors and managers. She burned to do the real thing, her ambition not being satisfied as easily as that of the other members of the chorus, who idled about after rehearsals, giggling and ogling the principal actors. The only pleasure Mary found in the whole thing after she had learned her " business " was in an occasional word with Willis, who seemed more interested in her success than in the success of the show he was backing.

Mary was disappointed by the change in Daisy Meade; out of work, she had been a pleasant companion; now, with a principal part in a small company, she had become a flighty, silly, light-lured moth, who inspired vague doubts instead of confidence.

The change in Daisy was particularly noticeable on the day of the opening. She treated Mary in a very condescending manner and went

off early in a taxi to attend a dinner, after bidding Mary a patronizing good-by.

In a prosaic street car Mary rode alone to the theater, a popular priced family playhouse far uptown.

There was an anxious, apprehensive atmosphere behind the scenes which she felt strongly as she entered. Overwrought nerves, stretched too tight by long rehearsals, were beginning to make trouble. No one seemed in a pleasant mood except Mr. Willis, who met Mary as she started for Daisy's dressing room, which Willis had arranged for her to share. He handed her a bunch of dewy violets, remarking, " I thought you might like to wear these in the forest scene."

" Thank you so much," said Mary, burying her face in the fresh, fragrant flowers and walking on toward her dressing room as though in a dream.

She placed the violets tenderly on the table and sat looking at them, her thoughts wandering until a call boy passed, chanting " Twenty minutes! Twenty minutes! "

Quivering with excitement, Mary turned from the flowers to her make-up table and began rubbing cold cream on her face with trembling fingers.

She wondered why Daisy had not come. She grew anxious as the call boy returned, this time

crying, "Fifteen minutes." Her heart gave a sudden bound. Perhaps Daisy would not appear, possibly the chance would come for her to go on as "The Daisy Maid." In a flutter of nervous fear she threw open the dressing room door and looked out.

Daisy suddenly appeared, hurrying across the stage. She entered the dressing room with a nod to Mary and threw off her wraps like a queen, seating herself quickly at the dressing table. Mary noticed that her face was flushed and her eyes too brilliant, but she did not suspect the cause.

"You're late," she suggested, arranging Daisy's rouge box, eyebrow pencil and powder puff, in an effort to be helpful.

"I guess the show can wait for me," answered Daisy, with a conceited toss of her head.

Mary did not like her in this mood. She turned to her own affairs and carefully pinned on the bunch of violets.

"Where'd you get 'em?" asked Daisy, turning with a rabbit's foot poised in one hand.

"Mr. Willis," Mary stammered.

"Hum," sniffed Daisy. A minute later she called a messenger and sent him out with money to buy her a bunch of roses.

In spite of Mary's vague dread of that first performance, she did well. After momentary embarrassment before the audience, she grew

calm and went through her part as she had while playing to empty chairs, though there was some stimulus in the applause which broke forth spasmodically.

Mary left the stage in a glow of enthusiasm after the successful rowboat scene and stood in the wings to watch Daisy. There was a note of insolent triumph in her room-mate's acting which did not accord with the character of the simple country girl she was portraying. Mary shivered slightly at the artificial unreality of it, until, receiving her cue, she went on again and forgot everything in doing her best to interpret the woodsy, outdoor feeling of the forest. The forest scene, she reflected, for which Willis had given her the violets dancing at her belt.

When it was all over Mary slipped away before any of the others and went straight home. She knew she could not expect Daisy for many hours, so, putting on her night-gown, which resembled the simple one-piece garment "The Daisy Maid" wore in the comedy, Mary went through the part as she would have liked to play it. She had not finished when Daisy returned, wildly elated by the success of the first night, but worn out by the ensuing celebration Mary had dodged.

They went to bed almost in silence, and Mary was out for a walk in the park next day long before Daisy awakened. When Mary returned,

her room-mate had gone, leaving a note that she would not be back until dinner time.

Mary had hardly read the hurried scrawl when the door burst open and Daisy, white to the lips, staggered in and dropped on the bed.

"I'm all in, dearie," she murmured. "The strain of getting back into the game was too much for me. Just when I'm making it go, *I* cave in. That's me. That's always my luck."

Mary wanted to suggest that if Daisy had kept better hours and conserved her strength she would not have taken sick, but she felt it was hardly the time for advice.

"Had I better get a doctor?" she suggested quickly.

"Yes, yes," answered Daisy, her lips twisting with pain.

Mary sped out of the room, forgetting her hat; she ran across the street and up the steps to a doctor's office, waiting until the physician accompanied her to Daisy's bedside.

"A nervous breakdown," was his diagnosis. "Too much burning the candle at both ends. A few days of perfect rest in bed and you'll be all right."

"But I've got to go on to-night," cried Daisy, a haggard, haunted look in her eyes.

"That would be dangerous."

"Even if it is, I've got to do it. It's only the second night of the show, and they'd give the

part to somebody else for the rest of the season if I fell down to-night," sobbed Daisy.

"Can't you help her so she can get there?" urged Mary, forgetting herself in Daisy's trouble.

"Well, I don't think it would be wise," the doctor shook his head. "I believe you had better notify your manager that you are ill, that you can't go on until to-morrow at least."

"I'll do no such thing," Daisy flashed, rising in bed for a moment, only to drop back exhausted by the effort.

"You will be very unwise if you attempt to get up sooner. If you could have someone to massage your head and give you constant care perhaps you could return to work in twenty-four hours."

"I'll do it," offered Mary, sitting on the edge of the bed and beginning to rub Daisy's forehead with tense, strong fingers.

"That feels good," murmured Daisy, her eyes closing.

"You take a rest, that's what you need," advised the doctor, making out a prescription which he handed to Mary with instructions to have it filled as soon as she could soothe Daisy to sleep.

Mary put in a busy day between running for medicine, administering it, massaging Daisy and trying to quiet her troubled mind. Six o'clock

came before she realized it. Under her care Daisy had improved; by summoning her nerve, she sat up in bed and ate a light supper Mary had provided from a restaurant on the street.

"I'll be all right now," she said, pressing her lips together with determination. "I'll go on to-night in spite of the doctor's orders."

"Do you really think you'd better?" asked Mary anxiously, afraid to urge that Daisy stay at home, for fear of seeming self-interested.

"I'm going to! That's all! See if I don't!" cried Daisy, rising weakly from bed and slipping her feet into comfortable slippers. "I wouldn't see anybody else take the part of 'The Daisy Maid' for a whole lot; even you, dearie."

"Of course not," said Mary, knowing how Daisy must feel, and really glad that she had decided to go against the doctor's orders.

"If you'll just run up to Mrs. Stearn's on a Hundred and Thirtieth Street for me, dearie," said Daisy, "and get that dress she promised for to-night. I can manage about getting out of here all right and I'll go to the show in a taxi."

"Why, yes, I'll get the dress," said Mary, keeping a note of weariness out of her voice, for she had hoped for a few minutes to herself for supper and rest before the night's work. But there was no time now. She started at once to the dressmaker's, secured the costume and, all out of breath, reached her room in the theater

just as the call boy was shouting "Fifteen minutes!"

Daisy had not come. Mary felt that something had happened. While she was debating whether or not to report the absence to Mr. Jackson, Daisy tottered into the dressing room and dropped down limply on a chair. Mary rushed to support her as she swayed unsteadily.

"Daisy! Daisy!" she cried, as a deathly pallor crept over the actress's face and her eyes looked hard and glassy.

"I wasn't late!" gasped Daisy, her feverish lips trembling. "I'll go on. See if I don't!" She tried to stiffen her neck assertively, but in that instant her head dropped back and she collapsed over the chair.

Mary shook her, called to her, and slapped her wrists, hoping to restore consciousness. But Daisy Meade lay limp, her eyes closed, her breath seemingly suspended.

Mary flew to the door and wrenched it open. The call boy was passing. "Dick! Dick!" she cried. "Get Mr. Jackson, quick!"

CHAPTER VI

A TRIUMPH

MANAGER JACKSON came. He stared stupidly at Daisy and then looked to Mary for an explanation.

"She has been sick all day," cried Mary. "The doctor told her not to come. He said it was a nervous breakdown."

Jackson's face knotted and his fists clenched, he stood a moment in thought and then rushed to the door, crying, "Mr. Willis! Mr. Willis!"

A moment later the sombre-eyed, clean-cut young man appeared in the doorway; he glanced apprehensively toward Mary and looked relieved on finding she was all right.

"Daisy Meade has caved in," cried Jackson.

"I've been afraid of it," said Willis curtly. "Have you sent for a doctor?"

"No," answered Jackson.

Willis stepped to the door and spoke to a stage-hand, then he returned and helped Mary, who was chafing Daisy's wrists. Daisy did not move.

"She can't go on to-night. She can't go on!

What shall we do? " Jackson shouted hysterically, his face very red.

" Hold the curtain five minutes! " ordered Willis. " Miss Dangerfield," he turned to Mary. " The doctor will be here in a moment. Will you please go to Miss Knowlton's dressing room and dress for the part of ' The Daisy Maid '? "

His request was so quiet and matter-of-fact that Mary dropped Daisy's hand and started for the star's dressing room without really realizing what she was going to do. She was stopped abruptly by the harsh voice of Jackson.

" But this is no night to try experiments, Willis! " he cried. " The house is all sold out."

" This is not an experiment. I have been watching Miss Dangerfield's work," answered Willis with a reassuring smile.

Mary was quivering from fatigue and excitement, on the verge of a collapse herself, but Willis' words strengthened her; she drew herself together with a fixed determination to do her best.

" But, man! It's a big chance you're taking. Audiences are fickle. If we fail it's a black eye in the business," cried Jackson.

" Well, who else can you put on? " replied Willis in final argument.

Jackson paced back and forth, his hands clenched behind his back. The doctor came, and

Willis nodded to Mary to dress. She slipped out and stole into Miss Knowlton's dressing room with the costume Daisy had sent her for.

With eager fingers she undid the package, hoping the dress would fit. She felt light-headed and everything whirled about her, but Willis' assurance that she could fill the part gave her confidence. She felt his supporting strength behind her.

Miss Knowlton, who was really the star of the show, though her part did not have the possibilities of "The Daisy Maid," grudgingly made room for Mary and looked her over critically.

"Are you ill?" she asked, staring at Mary's tense lips and white cheeks.

"Why, no," said Mary, "but I'm a little nervous. I've never been on the stage but one night. I'll be all right when I get on, but I can't help feeling this way. I guess it's because I haven't had anything to eat to-day."

"Nothing to eat! You must send out for a sandwich," replied Miss Knowlton; "you might give away entirely."

"I won't have time for a sandwich," answered Mary, slipping off her own dress and getting into the country girl gown. She felt quite at home in it and, with the aid of the wardrobe mistress, managed to make it fit.

Sounds from the audience "out front" came to Mary's ears. She heard a low buzz of talk-

ing, the flutter of programs and fans and the tramp of feet on the aisles, above the loud and rapid beating of her own heart. The noise of people calmed her. She knew they would expect the best from her, and she made a determined vow to deliver it.

The professional dresser had finished with the gown and Mary stood ready when Jackson looked in to cry, "Well, can you make a curtain in two minutes?"

"Yes," she answered confidently.

"Good for you, Girlie," he smiled, stepping into the room, and approaching Mary to pat her on the arm with his accustomed familiarity.

But Mary drew back and he stopped short, his manner a little less enthusiastic as he continued, "Now it's up to you, Girlie. Put it across, that's all I ask of you. They say you can do it. But you've got to show me."

"I will," answered Mary purposefully.

She walked out of the room after him, repeating the first lines of her new part. Actors and actresses rushed up to speak to her. "Keep a stiff upper lip!" "Get by!" "Keep your eyes moving, don't look at any one part of the house or it'll get you!" Everyone had his word of advice for the beginner, of whose chance most were jealous.

Mary took her place quietly with two or three actors who were walking back and forth, taking

a final glance at their "lines." The lights were all on and everything was in readiness. Mary looked back at the group of show-girls she had left; they were huddled together, whispering about the sensation of the night, each explaining to the others just how much better she could take Miss Meade's place than that girl Dangerfield.

Mary was unconscious of it all; she hardly saw anyone as her eyes swept the stage for Mr. Willis. She wondered where he was, between snatches of worrying about Daisy and repeating "Daisy Maid" lines.

The curtain went up abruptly with Miss Knowlton and the leading man on the stage. Mary hovered in the wings, awaiting her cue; she looked past the noisome, lurid rural scenery and saw far off, in her mind's eye, the rolling fields on the mainland near Moseses Island. She saw the meadow where she had played by herself as a girl. All the pent-up longing of years during which she had been denied playmates swept over her. She would play the part just like a real girl, she would release all those old desires, live her girlhood over again.

Mary almost started onto the stage as she suddenly heard the cue for the chorus. The girls danced on gaily without her. Mary's throat burned, she could not swallow, something seemed to shut off her breath, she wondered if

she would be able to talk. She hoped the chorus girls would get many encores, to prolong her entrance. But they did not. They came dancing off a minute later and crowded back into the wings, breathing hard. The house applauded, Miss Knowlton took the encore alone and then skipped off.

"You've got your business down pat, haven't you?" she asked Mary anxiously, stopping beside her. "It's a good house to-night and you mustn't crab my part. Just keep cool, go slow and follow Jack. He'll pull you through."

The advice only made Mary more nervous; but an instant later Willis rushed to her side and breathlessly handed her a dainty doll he had finally found in the property room. "There!" he exclaimed. "That will help bring back childhood days. Take the doll on with you. That part needed something to make it more real."

"Thank you," said Mary, feeling sure the doll would help. "Is Daisy all right?"

"Yes, yes, everything is all right," answered Willis with a confident smile. "Just forget everything but the fact that you're a little girl again and you're going to be allowed to play with your doll for an hour or two."

"All right," breathed Mary, looking deep into Willis's fine eyes as she waited for her cue.

"Now! Now, Girlie!" Jackson whispered

hoarsely, rushing up as the leading man turned toward Mary's entrance and gave the cue: "Why, I believe this is the little girl coming now."

Eager hands gently pushed Mary forward, but she did not need the help. She skipped lightly onto the stage, dangling her doll by one arm and looking high up into the trees with a mysterious, childlike smile, as though she saw squirrels, owls, elfs and all manner of droll things in the tip-top branches.

"Oh," she cried in simulated astonishment as she nearly bumped into the leading man. It was part of her business, but she did it so naturally that it seemed accidental to the audience, who laughed and applauded.

Mary, paying no more attention to the applause than she would to the buzzing of a fly, picked up a basket and began filling it with artificial daisies, the kind that grow on hats. She picked them as happily and eagerly as though they were real, buried her fresh face in them and gave them to Dolly to smell. Recognizing real naïve childhood, the audience grinned appreciatively and clapped heartily.

"That's the stuff!" whispered "Jack," the leading man, leaning toward Daisy with an admiring gaze.

Mary glanced toward the house for the first time, to avoid his look and forget his presence as

far as her part would allow. The sight of hundreds of upturned, eager faces made her self-conscious for a moment and she lost the poise that so far had carried her through. It was the first time she had realized that all those people were hanging on her words, her actions; and that they approved.

Turning her eyes to the wings, where she saw Willis watching her glowingly, Mary pulled herself together and did not hazard another look. She kept her head shyly bowed, which went well with the part, and returned to playing with her doll. The house laughed aloud—well pleased by her acting.

Before Mary realized that the scene was over the curtain fell. Willis rushed forward and was first to congratulate her. Their hands met in a warm clasp behind the curtain while the audience, floor, balcony and gallery, burst into loud applause.

"It's all meant for you, Miss Dangerfield. Think of that!" beamed Willis. He ducked back as the curtain flew up and revealed Mary alone, walking slowly across the stage toward her dressing room, musing on Willis's words and not realizing at all that the audience was watching her.

The curtain fell a second time, and the audience clapped for it to rise again. The leading man caught Mary's hand as she was passing off

and led her back to the foot-lights. She looked into the twinkling eyes of her satisfied audience and received her first thrill of success, achievement.

They called her back a third time before they were satisfied; and on the way to her room Mary received an ovation no less enthusiastic from the whole company, including "Props," the call boy, and an overbold stage hand.

In the dressing room Miss Knowlton threw her arms around Mary and hugged her tight. "You saved the show," she cried. "You're better than Daisy Meade! Salaries will all go on for a good many weeks to come." Professional pride bowed with appropriate humility before the necessity of making a living.

Jackson rushed into the dressing room, bursting with gratitude. Probably he would have attempted to repeat Miss Knowlton's reception of the new-born actress, had it not been for Mary's calm, reserved manner.

"I knew you could get by, Girlie!" he cried. "I said from the first you were the stuff, the real stuff."

"Thank you," she nodded abruptly, turning to her table. "Would you mind closing the door as you go out? I must dress for the second act."

"Oh, certainly, certainly." Jackson skulked out of the room and closed the door, feeling a

little sheepish that it was Willis who had discovered Mary's talent and not he.

Mary waited in her dressing room until time to go on in the second scene, wishing to escape further congratulations which might take her mind off her part. She did not feel hungry or faint now, she fed on excitement and really felt better for not having eaten. All that bothered her was that her legs were tired from running all day in the service of Daisy.

She looked forward to the second scene, tripping out gayly when she heard her cue, still clinging to the doll, which had proved helpful.

After a vivacious dialogue with the leading man, in which Mary distinguished herself by her simple, hesitant manner of speaking, Mary started to run away from him. She threw herself into the chase with such abandon that the audience grew excited and sat on the edge of their chairs, laughing, applauding and hoping the girl would get away. Mary vaulted fences with one hand and cleared the hedge at a running jump which Jack could not duplicate. The supple sinews she had developed on Moseses Island stood her in good stead. All the realism there was she put into the scene, and all the artistry. When she ran off at the finish the house thundered its appreciation, and her name was shouted from the gallery.

The following scenes were easy for Mary; she

had captured her audience, and all that was necessary was to remember her lines. Every time she appeared her triumph increasd, and in the finale, when she came on as a city girl, she made a great impression, acting the change in character with subtle simplicity.

When the drop descended on the last act the fact that Mary had " arrived " was well established.

She ran to her dressing room to remove her make-up and dodge congratulations. But several members of the company followed her, exclaiming as they shook her hand, " You shouldered the whole show! " " You're wonderful! " " Remarkable work! " " A born ingénue! "

Mary dimpled in reply, " It was mostly luck. I was scared to death."

" Scared! I should say not," cried Jackson. " Say, we've got to celebrate this success. Miss Knowlton, Jack, you, and I, will have a little supper on this." He beamed at Mary.

" No, thanks," she said slowly, looking at Willis, who stood outside the door waiting to congratulate her when there were fewer people about. " I must get home to see Daisy now."

" Poor Daisy is in the hospital," said Jackson, drawing in his smile in consideration of the proprieties; a moment later he continued softly,

" So you needn't let Daisy bother you, Girlie."

" What hospital? " asked Mary anxiously.

" St. Vincent's; it was the nearest one."

" But was she that sick? " A worried frown puckered Mary's brow.

" The doctor said she was pretty bad," commented Jackson cold-bloodedly, trying to catch Mary's gaze.

" I must go to the hospital and see her right away," replied Mary, industriously wiping off her make-up.

" They won't let you in till to-morrow. Come along with us," urged Jackson.

Mary felt too tired for a celebration and the suggested supper offered no allurement.

" Thank you very much, but such a lot has happened to-day; I need a good sleep more than anything to eat," she answered.

" Oh, all right, Girlie. That's up to you," said Jackson in a disappointed tone. " Some other night maybe? "

" Maybe," repeated Mary.

When Jackson had left, Mary changed her dress for street clothes and, saying good-night to Miss Knowlton, slipped out. Willis was waiting for her by the door. A happy little thrill ran through her as he stepped to her side and walked to the street with her in silence.

" Since Miss Meade can't go home with you I thought perhaps you might not like to go

alone," he suggested in a manner inviting a frank reply, when they were outside.

"Thank you," said Mary, lifting her eyes to his. "You are thoughtful."

"Oh, we must be careful of our stars," he smiled. "We don't want anything to happen to the people who make the show."

"But I have a very small part in that," said Mary.

"Oh, no, not now. I think we could afford to lose any two actors better than we could afford to lose you."

"I didn't dream I'd be so important to-night, after just being in the chorus yesterday."

"That's the way things happen in theatrical life. You'll never be in the chorus again," said Willis.

"But when Daisy is well enough to come back?" Mary asked.

"She will have to take a minor part. That's one of the heartless things about this business. The show has to go on, you know. It doesn't wait for anybody."

"But she must have her part back when she's well. I wouldn't want to keep it."

"Tired of being a real actress already?" smiled Willis, helping her onto a street car.

"Why, no," answered Mary, "but I don't think I'd like to be one for long. I want to see all sides of life, now that I have the chance."

"Well, that's not a bad idea. The stage is awfully self-centered. I don't think you'd like the grind right along, but you certainly have big possibilities." Willis looked at her earnestly. "The stage is too artificial for you, though. You seem made for real life."

"That's the way I feel about it," said Mary. "I want to get into business and make some money, so I can travel."

"You will get Miss Meade's salary while you are taking her part, and you ought to be able to save some of that."

"Seventy-five dollars!" exclaimed Mary breathlessly. "Why, I'm not worth that."

"You're worth a good deal more to the play, but Jackson wouldn't pay more. I suppose he'll even say it is bad business to give you so much."

"I can save fifteen dollars a week out of my twenty-five as soon as I get some more clothes," confided Mary.

"You can!" Willis's eyes widened in surprised admiration. "Well, you certainly are ambitious."

"I'm just beginning to learn that it takes money to do things," she answered.

"That's right," agreed Willis, with a whimsical smile; "I suppose a whole lot can be done on fifteen dollars a week, if one knows how."

Mary wished the ride home were longer; she liked to sit beside Willis and talk to him; he

seemed more her kind than anyone she had ever met. By the time they had reached her street she had forgotten all fatigue.

"Get a good rest now," Willis suggested as he left her at the boarding house door. "You've paved the way to being a big star on Broadway one of these days. But I believe you're right in wanting to think it over. There's lots to be said for and against a stage career."

"Yes," mused Mary, giving him her hand in parting. "I wouldn't want to be an actress long. I'd rather go to bed earlier and live a more natural life. I've an idea I'd like to be a business woman. Is it hard to learn stenography?"

"What an idea!" laughed Willis. "Well, we'll talk about it again. Good-night."

Mary skipped up to her room and rapidly undressed. She turned out the light and lay down on her cot wearily, but her eyes remained wide open. A throng of thoughts kept her awake. She began to think deliriously about the possibilities of seventy-five dollars a week. That would be a fortune to her. She could take a better room, by herself perhaps, and save two hundred dollars in one month. She gasped with the realization. After a few months she would have enough saved to break away from the stage and go into business. She cherished the thought of being a business woman. She

wanted to equip herself to find out who she was and take the station in life to which she felt she had been born. But before doing that she would have to learn a great deal, and find out much.

The picture of Daisy came before her eyes; her old-young face with its pathetic lines of tragedy. She did not want to look like that, and yet that was the way one grew to look on the stage; she was sure of it, for Miss Knowlton had the same hard expression. Besides, Mary felt that Willis admired her more for not wanting to follow the stage as a career, and what he thought meant something to her already.

On the night of her first success she had the wisdom to doubt the applause and the glamour and look forward to a life more real.

Her thoughts finally drifted into dreams and at last she slept, her lips parted in a clinging smile of vibrant anticipation.

CHAPTER VII

A CRISIS COMES

NEXT morning when Mary awoke she lay languorously for half an hour, trying to order the exciting events of the night before. They seemed incidents in a chaotic dream too good to be real.

At last she rose with a lingering sigh of pleasure and dressed to visit Daisy at the hospital. After a hurried breakfast she rode to St. Vincent's and found Daisy in a private room, tucked into a clean white bed, her face as colorless as the sheets, her hands limp and pale.

"Oh, hello, dearie," whispered Daisy in a faint voice, her hollow eyes fixing hungrily on the fresh beauty of the younger woman. "How did everything go last night?"

"Everything was all right," said Mary, putting her cool hand soothingly on the puckered forehead. "Everybody missed you. I am so glad you're better."

"Oh, I'm all right; I'm made of iron," replied Daisy thickly, stirring restlessly in bed and dropping her gaze. "I'll go back in a week,

see if I don't! The doctor says it will be a month, but I know better."

"You must get a real rest this time," urged Mary.

"Oh, yes." Daisy's eyes flashed with their old fire. "You want me to stay in bed so you can keep my part, I suppose. I heard that they put you in."

"I'll be glad to give you your part," said Mary, overlooking the sick woman's querulous tone. "But you mustn't worry about those things till you're a whole lot better."

"If I didn't worry I couldn't keep alive," said Daisy.

The nurse stepped up to the bedside and raised her eyebrows significantly to Mary. "I am afraid Miss Meade is not strong enough to talk any more this morning."

Mary pressed Daisy's hand in good-by, and left. She spent the remainder of the day in rehearsing her new part, and scored a second success that night.

During the busy week that followed, Manager Jackson assured her that she would have the part of Daisy Maid as long as the play lasted and told her that she would receive Daisy's salary.

Mary was given a dressing room of her own, which Willis supplied with flowers. She bought costumes and grease paints with her second

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week's salary and made her dressing room into a snug, business-like bower.

Meanwhile Daisy was slowly improving.

On the night before Daisy's return to the company Mary sat alone in her dressing room, wondering about the future. She had made up her mind to insist that Daisy take back her part, but the thought of giving up the character of the Daisy Maid was hard for her. As she sat looking at her costumes and make-up outfit she could not find it in her heart to give them up. They had become an important part of her life already. In the old days, back in Billy Peart's ice cream parlor, she had had no personal possessions, so it was natural that these first things of her own should thrill her as much as the excitement of the new life she was leading, with its applause and stimulating appreciation. She had won all these fairly, with her own abilities. There was no reason why she should give them up to Daisy, except that of friendship. Daisy alone had been responsible for her introduction to the stage, and Mary felt she owed her a debt of gratitude.

Yet Mary's mind was not wholly made up by the following evening when Daisy, well and happy, appeared at the stage entrance. Jackson greeted Daisy curtly and Willis stopped to congratulate her on her recovery.

"I am sorry I gave out so soon after open-

ing," said the actress, "but you got a good girl to fill in. I told you she was clever, didn't I?"

"Yes, you are a good judge of talent," put in Jackson, stepping before Willis and facing Daisy. "Miss Dangerfield has filled the part so nicely that we are going to keep her in it."

"But my contract!" cried Daisy hotly.

"Your contract has a conditional clause about failure to appear."

"But—"

"Now, we haven't time to argue, Daisy," said Jackson in a tone of finality. "You have lost the part. That is all there is to it. We'll keep you on as a show-girl and give you a few lines, at thirty-five a week; but it's only charity."

"I get my old dressing room, don't I?" asked Daisy, giving in grudgingly to the inevitable.

"No, I'm sorry; Miss Dangerfield has that. You will have to dress with the other girls, in room eighteen."

"Well, I'll go on to-night as a show-girl just to oblige you, but you wait till I see my lawyer about that contract," flashed Daisy.

She flung down the corridor and rushed past Mary, who had recognized her voice and left her dressing to greet her.

Mary stood back in surprise as Daisy hurried by without a word of greeting. Willis stepped

up to Mary a moment later and said softly, "You will have to overlook Miss Meade's actions to-night. Jackson has told her she will have to go on with the chorus. Naturally it's hard for her."

Before Mary could answer he pointed to a notice pinned on the call board. It read:

The management extends an invitation to the entire company to attend a supper to be served on the stage after the performance.

"You will go?" asked Willis.

"If it's to welcome Daisy back, yes!" answered Mary.

"Well, it's not exactly that," smiled Willis. "I believe Jackson's idea in getting it up was to honor our new star."

Mary dropped her gaze. She understood that the supper was to be given for her, and it was hard to refuse, yet she did not like to hurt her room-mate's feelings.

"Say you will go," Willis urged. "The party is for you. You will enjoy it."

"Why, certainly," answered Mary, "if they want me."

"We couldn't have it without you," was Willis's reply.

Mary played haltingly that night, finding difficulty in throwing herself into the part while

she was conscious of Daisy's jealous eyes fixed upon her. She took herself severely to task and decided to give up her part to Daisy in spite of Willis's and Jackson's objections.

Changing hurriedly to street clothes after the last act, Mary stood shyly in the wings while the stage was being cleared to receive the long supper table. She wished she had not promised to attend. She expected trouble with Daisy and wanted to slip home and never return. Her eyes idly followed the waiters from a nearby restaurant, bringing in covered dishes and bottles, while her thoughts came in confusing succession.

Willis found her standing alone, and escorted her to the table where the company had already gathered. Mary saw Daisy at the far end of the table, near the show-girls. She spoke to Willis, asking him why Daisy did not sit with them.

"This supper is for you," he answered. "Daisy would not worry as much about you if she were the guest of honor."

He seated Mary at the head of the table and took the chair at her left, with Jackson on her right. They began to eat and talk, Mary conscious all the time of Daisy's wrathful, flushed face turned toward her. She did not enjoy the supper; eating mechanically and answering only when spoken to. The compliments she received from principals sitting around her seemed in-

sincere. They spoke of her acting in ardent terms and prophesied a great future, but Mary was indifferent. Miss Knowlton pinned a red rose from her bouquet on Mary's waist. Mary wished it had been Daisy who had given her the token of friendship and appreciation.

The thing that interested her most about the whole celebration was the rapidity with which the entire company emptied their wineglasses. Mary had tasted champagne for the first time, and had remarked with a disagreeable shiver, "It tastes like my foot's asleep." She did not like it, and the busy waiters had no chance to refill her glass.

As the dinner progressed she noted the increased flush on the faces about her, the wildly brilliant eyes and the high pitch of excited voices. Willis seemed to be the only one who had drunk in moderation, and Mary was glad to be sitting beside him.

It was nearly one o'clock when Jackson arose and held high a bubbling glass of champagne.

"Friends!" he cried.

A number of facetious answers were shouted at him.

"I want to propose a little toast."

"Here's to it," a tumultuous chorus replied.

"A toast to Mary, the Daisy Maid, who has not been with us very long, but who has been

making up for lost time." He put the glass to his lips and looked straight into Mary's eyes.

A great cheer greeted the toast as the members of the company scrambled to their feet to respond. A chair was knocked over. Someone mimicked the sound of popping corks and everybody laughed hysterically. Mary remained seated, a deep flush mounting to her temples. Her success seemed very cheap to her at that moment.

Suddenly Daisy Meade dashed from her place among the show-girls, a furious flare in her eyes. With head thrown defiantly back, she walked to the other end of the table and stood beside Mary.

Catching up Mary's full wineglass, she held it aloft and cried in an unsteady voice, " Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, the Daisy Maid is glad you appreciate her; but Mr. Jackson made a slight mistake in the name. The name is not Mary; it's *Daisy!* "

She drained the glass in silence.

Jackson caught her roughly by the arm. " Don't spoil this," he cried. " You have made enough trouble already, Daisy! "

Mary got tremblingly to her feet and put her hand on Jackson's shoulder. " The credit is all due to Daisy," she quavered, the whole company hanging on her words. " If it had not been for Daisy I would probably be sitting on a park

bench at this moment, or looking for work in a department store. I want Daisy to have the part she created. I am only glad I was able to fill in while she was sick."

Mary turned quickly from the table and ran toward the door amid a confused babble from the surprised company. She slipped out alone and hurried through the passageway to the street, her fingers clenched tightly, her lips drawn into a firm, purposeful line. Looking back, as she reached the street, she saw Willis, hatless, running after her.

"Won't you come back?" he cried. "You mustn't leave now. They'll calm Daisy. Jackson was going to present you with a loving cup."

"No, thank you," cried Mary spiritedly. "I don't like the stage; it's tawdry, trashy. There is too much jealousy and envy; the people are not real!"

Willis walked silently at her side. When they reached the street car he said softly, "I believe you are right."

Mary made no answer. After a pause Willis continued, "But what are you going to do now?"

"I am going to be a business woman," answered Mary confidently, stepping forward to stop an approaching car.

"Good for you," exclaimed Willis. "Have you any idea what kind of work you want?"

"No," answered Mary, "but I have enough money to last until I can find a place."

Willis helped her onto the car and followed in, forgetting that he was in evening clothes, without hat or overcoat. When the surprised stares of his fellow passengers brought his unconventional attire to his notice he smiled to Mary, who had suddenly realized the result of his impetuous dash after her.

"I'm afraid I was thinking more of you than myself," he said in a low vibrant tone, unmindful of the curiosity of the car full of people, his eyes fixed dreamily on the fascinating bronze coils of Mary's hair.

"You are awfully good to take so much interest in me," murmured Mary.

"I don't know how anybody could help being interested in you," he said earnestly. "You're so different."

"That's what Cap'n Jogifer used to say," Mary answered musingly.

"Captain Jogifer? Who's he?" asked Willis.

"Oh, he's a very dear old fellow who dredges for oysters far, far away from here, on a snug little island where people go to bed at eight o'clock and see nothing but clear blue water and drink little else."

"You sound homesick?" suggested Willis, anxious to find out more about this self-con-

tained little woman who seemed so different from the city-worn women he had seen so long. "Is that island your home?"

"Yes," said Mary slowly. "But I'm not exactly longing to go back. I'm just thinking that I didn't fully appreciate all the nice people there were on Moseses Island."

"Moseses Island! What an odd name," laughed Willis.

"Is it odd?" asked Mary. "It sounds sweet to me sometimes, when I see trouble. But I wouldn't like to go back there. Not for a long time, anyway. I've got to be successful first, and then I'd only want to stay long enough to see the Captain and Aunt Liza. But I'll have to be very successful first."

"And you think business will be better than the stage?"

"I'm sure now that I never want to go back to the theater. It's an unnatural life. It used to appeal to me when I had my dolls perform, but now I think I'd much rather sit in front without grease paint smeared all over me, and enjoy seeing other people work. It's not exciting enough. It's the same thing every time. I don't see how anyone can stand it night after night. It would kill me. I want adventures, business adventures. I want to make a lot of money, and I believe I can."

"If you like, I can probably get you a good

business position to start with," suggested Willis. "Certainly if you are as good a business woman as you are an actress your services will be valuable. May I help?"

"I would appreciate it very much," replied Mary.

CHAPTER VIII

IN BUSINESS

A WEEK later Mary found herself on the threshold of a new career. After the scene at the theater supper Daisy had not returned to her old room. When Mary had awakened the following morning and found Daisy's bed untouched, she decided suddenly to leave the room and find a place where she could make a new start by herself. She had packed hurriedly and written a note to Daisy, telling her how sorry she was about the trouble and thanking her for her friendship. She had closed the note by wishing Daisy all sorts of luck and success and pinned it to the bed cover, laying beside it the rose Miss Knowlton had given her. Then, feeling better, Mary had moved to a new room farther down-town on a quieter street.

Willis was the only person to whom she sent her new address. She wanted to cut herself off completely from the life she had dabbled in. Willis had called the following night and Mary had received him cordially in the downstairs parlor of her modest boarding house.

He brought two interesting items of news.

One, that Jackson had given Daisy back her old part and that Daisy was very repentant and wanted badly to find Mary. The other, that he had spoken to a friend, Morton Rayner, about Mary, and that Mr. Rayner was anxious to engage a girl of her pluck, energy and initiative as his private secretary.

Mary protested that she did not know enough for such a responsible position, that she could not typewrite or use shorthand. Willis laughed her doubts away with the assurance that she could pick up both shorthand and typewriting in her spare time, and that meanwhile she could learn her duties as confidential secretary in the big real estate company of which Rayner was senior partner.

So Mary had accepted the position eagerly, and for five days had filled it so efficiently that Rayner gave her entire charge of his personal affairs.

Feeling that she was handicapped by having no knowledge of shorthand or typewriting, Mary made a sudden resolve to go to night school and learn stenography. With characteristic enthusiasm she plunged into the work, even putting off Willis in favor of a class when he wrote a note asking if he could call again. Mary was not yet ready to give up business for pleasure. She put in six full days a week acquiring business knowledge. At first she made many

mistakes, but by slow, careful, conscientious plugging, in a month's time the whole office force looked upon her with respect.

Nights when she returned from school at ten o'clock, after hard days in the office, Mary sometimes found it hard to smile. But by dropping into bed, turning out the light, and closing her eyes, she could call up the familiar picture of sailing with Cap'n Jogifer. The memory of his cheerful optimism was a constant source of inspiration to her.

"Hold her hard in the wind!" Cap'n Jogifer would shout when her hands ached sometimes from clinging to a sheet rope. Mary had held hard and enjoyed the knowledge that she was making the little skiff race along on wave-crests. The memory of those unforgettable moments helped her to hold hard now, and after each summoning of the old picture she felt refreshed, as though she had actually received a stimulating dash of fresh salt spray in her rosy face.

At first her work in the real estate office was confined to routine details, but as time went on she managed to find interesting things to do in business.

Before her first month was up she had evolved a scheme for selling a big house that Mr. Rayner had never been able to get a good price for, because of its bad location. Elevated

cars roared by in front of the house and a busy street car line behind it. The noise was unbearable and cut the price of the building in half because tenants could not be found who could stand it. But Mary got an idea.

"Why not sell it as a home for the deaf?" she suggested to Rayner. "It's a good house, and deaf people wouldn't mind the noise."

"That's a real inspiration," answered her employer, a kindly, hearty man who did not look his sixty years in spite of white hair and mustache.

A few days later he handed Mary a check for two hundred dollars.

"What's that for?" she asked wonderingly.

"It's for your idea about selling that apartment house. I sold it to be used as a deaf and dumb asylum. I got easily ten thousand more from them than anyone else would have paid. Willis was certainly right when he recommended you as a girl with energy and brains."

The check quivered in Mary's hand; she received a thrill more pleasant than any that had resulted from her success on the stage. She felt certain that she would make good in business.

By redoubling her application to stenography at night, it was not long before she began making records at the school.

Her amazing energy had found another outlet, and she mastered the typewriter so thor-

oughly that in two months' time she entered a speed contest, battling with a dozen girls for supremacy at the machine while the instructor stood before them with a stop-watch and closely scrutinized the work of each.

When he came to Mary's copy he pronounced it accurate, and timed her while she ran off a page, zipping it from the carriage at the finish with a triumphant toss of her head.

When the words were counted and the time computed the instructor exclaimed, "Forty-four words a minute. Good enough! You'd do better as a teacher than a scholar from now on."

"That's fine," enthused the crowd of girls with whom Mary had become popular. Pleased with her success, she continued school for a few more weeks, until she had mastered shorthand.

Rayner was enthusiastic when Mary announced to him one morning that she could take all his dictation and handle the correspondence herself. He put her in charge of his corps of stenographers and moved her desk into his own room, placing her next in authority to his confidential man, Dundon.

At first Mary enjoyed the change, but gradually Dundon's presence began to bother her. They were alone in the big room nearly all day, Mr. Rayner visiting his office for only an hour or two around noon.

Mary tried to force herself to like Dundon, but there was something creepy about the man that made her feel shivery in his presence. He wore rubber heels and slipped back and forth from his desk to the safe with the cautious, stealthy tread of a cat. Intuitively Mary suspected him. She felt that he hated her and knew that he was continually looking for flaws in her work, despite his manner of smiling suavity.

Mary's magnetic management was much more to the liking of the employees than Dundon's cold, critical issuance of orders. It seemed inevitable that they would clash.

Early in their association, Mary saw Dundon deliberately smudge some letters she had written at his dictation. Turning quickly, he caught her eyes fixed upon him and slipped the letters into a drawer of his desk.

When Mary returned after luncheon she found that Mr. Rayner had arrived during her absence and was reading over the pile of smudged letters, which Dundon had evidently left for his persual before going out to lunch.

"This is not your work, is it?" asked Mr. Rayner, looking up from one of the letters.

"It is," said Mary, "but it was a cleaner copy than that when it left my hands." She said nothing more, feeling it beneath her to tell

Rayner that Dundon had purposely mussed the sheets.

She was glad that the incident had occurred, however, for it confirmed her suspicions of the confidential employee and caused her to keep close watch of him.

When Dundon returned after his noon hour he seemed disappointed in the calm atmosphere of the office and made no mention of the letters, though he watched Mary curiously as she retyped them.

After Rayner had left the office for the day Mary noticed that Dundon immediately picked up the telephone and called a number that had become familiar to her through hearing him repeat it several times daily. He spoke in a low, guarded tone, and for the first time Mary took an interest in what he said. Several times he repeated the words "stocks" and "bonds." His conversation seemed to concern money, and Mary noted with interest that he did not refer to the real estate business in any way. Probably it was either a private call, or some business with the bank, she concluded; but the fact that he never asked for that number in the presence of Rayner seemed strange to her. Dundon's manner impressed her with a vague sense of double dealing. She did not like his pale eyes and face, his sudden movements and anxious, crafty manner. Some subtle sense

warned her that something was wrong. She did not know what and had not enough knowledge of business to find out.

One evening when Willis called upon her, as he had several times since she had finished her course at night school, Mary asked him about Dundon.

"I really don't know much about the man, but old Rayner seems to have unlimited confidence in him. I certainly don't like his looks, for my part."

"He seems to be worried all the time," remarked Mary, her forehead puckering slightly. "I would like to speak to Mr. Rayner about it, but I'm afraid he would think I was interfering."

"I would say something to him. I believe he has more confidence in your judgment than in Dundon's, even if you have been there only a few months."

Mary pondered on the subject; finally deciding that the wisest course would be to wait and watch until she had something actual to tell her employer.

One morning, on entering the office, Mary found that Dundon had already arrived. Usually he sauntered in half an hour later than she, but this morning he was sitting at his desk shuffling over some papers which he hurriedly crammed into his pocket on her entrance. Mary

noted that his eyes were bloodshot and there were haggard lines in his hard face. His eyes had a hunted look. She nodded good-morning to him and sat down at her desk.

Abruptly he began the routine of the day, and though Mary watched him closely he did not again take out the papers. She noticed, too, that that morning he did not make his usual call on the telephone.

Mary delayed going to luncheon, hoping that Rayner would come before she left. At half-past twelve Dundon glanced toward her uneasily and asked, "Why don't you go out to luncheon, Miss Dangerfield?"

"I have to finish this work," said Mary, pretending to be very busy with some letters she had already finished.

Dundon glowered in reply, and muttered something to himself. It was evident from his manner that he wanted to be alone in the room, and that Mary's presence was vexatious.

Presently, Rodgers, a rent collector for the firm, entered the office and threw down an empty black collection bag on Dundon's desk.

"Well, how are the collections to-day, Rodgers?" asked the confidential man, rising to face the collector, who threw his coat over the back of a chair near Dundon's desk and went to the corner washstand to refresh himself before starting out on his afternoon round.

"They'll be heavy this afternoon," replied Rodgers.

"That's good." Dundon rubbed his lean, smooth palms together. As Rodgers turned his attention to washing his hands, Dundon shot a keen glance in the direction of Mary, who was apparently occupied with her work. Dropping his eyes, he stepped to the chair over which the rent collector had hung his coat and slipped his fingers into the top pocket, deftly drawing out Rodgers' watch, which was fastened by a chain to the lapel.

Conscious of an oppressing silence, Mary looked toward Dundon out of the tail of her eye just in time to see him turn the watch stem and set the hour hand. Before she could glance back to her work Dundon returned the timepiece to the pocket and looked at her sharply. For an instant, a cruel, menacing flash lighted his eyes. Then he forced a smile and remarked pleasantly, "How's your work coming, Miss Dangerfield?"

"All right," she answered mechanically, wondering why he did not refer again to her late lunch hour.

Rodgers, having finished his toilet, took his coat from the chair and slipped it on, knowing nothing of the watch incident.

Dundon turned to him with a pleasant smile and spoke of yesterday's ball game. A minute

later he said casually, "Well, you're getting a good early start. You will probably be able to get in all the collections this afternoon."

"I will rush them right through and get them back at the usual time," answered Rodgers, nodding to Dundon and looking with interest toward Mary as he stepped out and closed the door behind him.

Mary turned to her typewriter and transcribed a letter mechanically, puzzling meanwhile about the watch and wondering why Dundon had re-set it. She did not like to go out to lunch and leave him in the office alone. Something told her it would be better to wait until Rayner appeared; but at length, noticing Dundon's uneasiness, and fearing that he would be suspicious if she lingered longer, Mary closed her desk and left.

She was gone less than half an hour, and on her return Mr. Rayner sat alone at his desk.

"Where is Mr. Dundon?" she asked.

"Out to lunch, I suppose," answered her employer, looking up from his papers with a smile.

"He wasn't here when you came in?" asked Mary, approaching his desk.

"No."

Mary stood uneasily before him. She wanted to tell him of her suspicions and yet feared to say a word. A premonition possessed her that

something was going to happen and that Mr. Rayner should be put on his guard.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Mr. Rayner pleasantly, noting her anxious manner.

Mary suddenly burst forth, relating all her fears without realizing on what a slight foundation they were based.

"My dear Miss Dangerfield," Mr. Rayner smiled paternally, "that's all very interesting, but I don't believe we have much to go on. Mr. Dundon has earned my confidence."

"I know it," said Mary confusedly. "It's just intuition I suppose, but something tells me he doesn't deserve your confidence."

"That's a woman's reason," answered the real estate man lightly, "but I am really glad you take such a vital interest in the business."

"I hope you don't think I am trying to injure Mr. Dundon with you," she said, "but really I am worried."

"Oh, you are making a mountain out of a molehill," he answered genially. "You don't suppose Dundon intended to steal that watch?"

"Why, no," replied Mary hesitantly.

"He put it back, didn't he?" continued Mr. Rayner.

"Y-yes," Mary said slowly.

"Well, then, I don't see that we have even a charge of petty larceny against him," laughed Mr. Rayner.

"But I am pretty sure that he re-set the hour hand on the collector's watch."

"I don't see any reason why he should do that." Mr. Raynor's manner was thoughtful. "The chances are he just glanced at Rodgers' watch to see what time it was. I wouldn't worry any more about it; but keep me posted if you notice anything else."

Mary returned slowly to her desk, feeling that she had been unwise in bringing the matter to her employer's attention. Yet she was certain that something was wrong. Her intuition was infallible. Naturally, Rayner, a cold business man, could not allow himself to be swayed by such an intangible argument.

Dundon returned shortly after two o'clock and spent half an hour going over business details with his chief. Mary busied herself with her work and forgot her fears until, glancing at the clock, she saw the hour hand pointing at three.

Mr. Rayner glanced at his watch at the same time, remarking nervously, "Why, where is Rodgers? He'll be too late for the bank."

Dundon looked sharply at Mary, whose head was bent over her work, and then replied suavely, "Oh, he'll be here all right. Even if he is a minute or two late we can check up the collections and get into the bank any time before a quarter after three."

" He is usually pretty punctual, though," remarked Mr. Rayner. " I hope he doesn't catch us to-day with a heavy collection that we will have to leave in the safe over night." He glanced toward the big iron strong box in the corner of the room, its top piled with papers and a letter press. The safe did not inspire confidence. Its chief virtue lay in being a fireproof box for important papers.

A minute or two later a friend called to see Mr. Rayner, and just as he was leaving Rodgers entered. He threw down his leather collection bag, unlocked it and took out several thousand dollars in large bills, the result of his collections.

" Here you are, Dundon," he said. " I make it $12,500.46 in cash."

Dundon began methodically counting the money. He stopped suddenly as Mr. Rayner stepped to his side and spoke to Rodgers.

" Look at the time, Rodgers," exclaimed Mr. Rayner in an irritated tone. " It's twenty minutes past three. You can't expect to get into the bank at this time of day. Why were you late? "

Rodgers stared stupidly at the wall clock, then one hand dropped to his coat pocket and he brought out his watch. " Look here," he said, pointing to the dial, " it's a quarter to three by this. I thought I had plenty of time."

"Well, your watch is wrong. That's all," replied Rayner, his lips drawn into a straight, severe line. "Better get it fixed. This must not happen again."

Mary turned from her desk to look at the trio. She saw that Dundon's eyes were cast down, counting the money, and noticed that his fingers trembled. Instantly she recalled the watch incident and realized that Dundon must have set Rodgers' timepiece back at least half an hour. Pressing her lips firmly together to keep from crying out in denunciation of Dundon, she studied Rayner's face. Suspicion showed in it for a moment and Mary thought he was recalling her story, when Dundon suddenly spoke.

"Why, I remember now, Rodgers," he said, "I meant to tell you this noon that your watch was wrong. I glanced at it just before lunch, while you were washing up. My watch is out of order, too. Then I got to thinking about collections and forgot to tell you."

Mary was deeply disappointed as she saw Mr. Rayner turn toward his confidential man with a relieved smile. Evidently Dundon's explanation had set his mind at rest. Mary bit her lips to prevent hasty words from slipping out.

"You should have told me," answered Rodgers. He turned to Mr. Rayner. "I am very sorry this thing happened. I didn't dream it

was more than a quarter to three. I will be more careful in the——"

"Oh, that's all right," Mr. Rayner smiled good-naturedly. "A fellow can't be infallible, and we all get so we depend too much on little things like watches that are apt to go wrong." He knew Rodgers to be a punctual, painstaking man and was glad of an opportunity to overlook a slight slip. "You can bank it to-morrow morning," he continued. "It will be perfectly safe here in the vault over night."

He picked up the pile of bills which Dundon had counted and started toward the safe. At the clothes tree in the corner by the washstand he stopped and took a black memorandum book from the inside pocket of his overcoat. Mr. Rayner alone had the combination to the safe, and he used it so seldom that it was always necessary for him to consult the numbers, which he had written in his memorandum.

As he knelt before the safe Dundon passed close behind him, stealing a glance at the notebook which his employer held open at the combination while he twirled the numbered steel knob.

Rayner swung the big door open abruptly and deposited the money on the floor of the safe, among private papers and books. He closed and locked it a moment later.

"There!" he exclaimed, rising, "we're on the safe side now."

CHAPTER IX

AFTER HOURS

MARY was not so sure that Mr. Rayner was on the safe side with his money in the strong box. She had not noticed Dundon glance over Rayner's shoulder at the notebook, but she looked up in time to see him watching with close interest as Mr. Rayner stepped back to the coat rack and returned the book to its pocket.

A moment later Rodgers left the office and Dundon stepped over to close the door, which the collector had left open. As he did so he tripped and fell heavily against the clothes tree. Mary turned in time to see him clutch at Mr. Rayner's overcoat for support. The coat slipped from its hanger and fell to the floor.

"I'm sorry," cried Dundon, recovering his balance and picking up the coat hurriedly. He stepped behind the screen which concealed the wash basin and took down a whisk broom hanging above it.

Mr. Rayner put his desk in order preparatory to leaving, while Dundon industriously brushed the overcoat behind the screen.

"Come on, Dundon! That's enough," called Rayner shortly. "I've got an appointment at the Colony Club. I must hurry."

Dundon's flushed face appeared around the edge of the screen.

"Just a minute," he said, forcing a smile.

Mary noted that though he had asked for more time the noise of brushing suddenly ceased.

But a moment later he stepped out and held the coat while Rayner slipped into it. Meanwhile Mary rose from her desk and stepped to the washstand to remove an ink stain from her fingers.

Dundon followed Rayner out of the private office, noting down instructions on some business matters Rayner had left unfinished.

As Mary washed her hands she inspected the corner where Dundon had repaired for the clothes brush. Mary was seeking for something, she knew not what. The length of time Dundon had taken in brushing Rayner's coat had strengthened her suspicions. She looked into all corners for something of possible interest.

At last she noticed a series of straggling figures scrawled on a phone pad hanging beside the towel rack for convenience in listing office laundry. She recognized the handwriting of Dundon. Her quick mind suggested that while

dusting Mr. Rayner's coat he had probably removed the black notebook and hurriedly copied off the combination on the first thing at hand.

Before Dundon returned to the room she tore off the yellow phone slip on which he had written and put down a series of different numbers on the sheet below, imitating Dundon's slanting, hurried figures as closely as possible.

Everything seemed clear to her now. Dundon must have set Rodgers' watch back so the money could not be taken to the bank that night, and he had certainly tipped over the coat tree in order to secure a copy of the combination.

As she heard Dundon returning, Mary folded the slip of paper on which he had written the figures and tucked it into her belt. She hurried to a chair and was at work on the typewriter when the confidential employee entered the room. He went directly to the washstand, and Mary heard a slight sound like the tearing of a piece of paper. She was certain then that she had guessed right and had acted wisely in leaving a substitute for the original numbers.

A minute later Dundon came out; he smiled with satisfaction, hurriedly arranged the papers on his desk, put on his hat and stopped for a moment to say, "I shan't be back this afternoon, Miss Dangerfield. If anything comes up you will attend to it."

When he was gone Mary drew a deep breath

and began to plan how she should act. She slipped behind the screen and looked at the memorandum pad. The sheet on which she had hastily scrawled the figures was gone. Her ruse had worked. Nothing more was necessary to convince her that Dundon intended to rob the safe that night. Her heart pounded madly. She sat down at her desk and ordered her thoughts. Office work was impossible for the remainder of the afternoon. She must figure out some sure plan by which to catch Dundon red-handed.

The words "Colony Club" came to her thoughts suddenly. Glancing at the clock, she saw that it was past four and realized that Mr. Rayner must have reached the club already. Stepping to the telephone, she called Mr. Rayner and had him on the wire in a moment.

"Where are you going to be this evening?" asked Mary breathlessly.

"I shall be here at the club until eleven," Mr. Rayner's pleasant voice came over the wire.

"All right. I will call you up if it's necessary."

"Anything wrong?" asked Rayner.

"I don't know for sure, but I may need your help."

She hung up the receiver and stepped to a long, high bookkeeper's bench on which Mr.

Rayner often examined ledgers. A vague recollection came to her that during her first days in the office she had seen a revolver in one of the drawers of that desk. With trembling fingers she pulled open each compartment and finally came upon a long, heavy pistol which she took out, fingering it gingerly, and wondering whether or not it was loaded. Mary's experience with firearms was decidedly limited. She did not know what to do with it now that she had found it, but possession of the weapon gave her a pleasant thrill of security. She felt sure that if Dundon did intend to rob the safe that night probably he would not be armed. The revolver would give her an advantage. She stepped to her desk and deposited it carefully in her stationery drawer.

Then she sat down and tried to work; but teeming thoughts possessed her, and she had accomplished nothing when the janitor looked into the room a little after five o'clock, closing hour, and seemed surprised on finding Mary still there.

"It won't be necessary to clean in here tonight," she said. "I have some work to finish. Has everyone left the office?"

"Yes'm," answered the janitor with an awkward bow.

Mary listened to his steps as he walked to the outer door and closed it behind him. She was

alone in the great real estate office at last, but the thought was not fearful.

Evening gradually drew in, long shadows stole through the windows and leaped about the walls, beckoning with grotesque fingers. Mary felt that the atmosphere of the office was decidedly creepy and eerie. She was tired out after the excitement of the day and very hungry, but she could not risk leaving the office long enough to get something to eat, and she did not dare to turn on a light to dispel the gloom.

In the street she heard the rush of home-going humans. The memory of her first day in New York came back to her. She closed her eyes and imagined that she was sitting on the bench in Madison Square watching and wondering, wide-eyed. Many things had happened since that first day, Mary reflected. Now she was a factor in that life at which she had marveled. She had enjoyed ever moment of the struggle. Disappointments seemed almost as pleasant as happy moments to her, now.

Suddenly the clock struck six and Mary sat up, startled by the noise which boomed through the room. She breathed softly, conscious of the swift beating of her heart. The suspense was unnerving. She got to her feet and walked quietly back and forth, avoiding the windows for fear of being seen from the street. She wished that she could turn on a light, but she was afraid

that if Dundon intended to come that night any light from the office windows would scare him away. Her gaze drifted toward the wall clock; the minutes seemed to crawl. She tried to think of pleasant things to make the time pass more swiftly, but in spite of all she could do her watch had become wearisome before seven o'clock. Every nerve in her body was tense with suppressed excitement. She wished that something would happen to relieve the strained suspense.

The hour between seven and eight seemed endless. It was days long. But finally the wall clock boomed eight times, its strokes echoed by bigger brothers in city towers outside. Mary wondered if, after all, her suspicions were false. Then suddenly the indistinct rattle of a key in the outer office came to her ears. Snatching up the revolver, which she had taken from the drawer and laid beside her typewriter for instant use, Mary crouched low and slipped softly behind the screen which concealed the washstand. She heard the outer office door open, and then faint steps approached. A corridor door was opened and softly shut. The steps came nearer.

Mary glanced around the edge of the screen and saw dimly the figure of a man gliding through the door into the private office. It must be Dundon, she thought. A moment later, as

the man stumbled against a chair and mumbled an oath, Mary recognized his voice.

At that instant her taut ear-drums caught the click of an electric switch and the room burst into light. Mary blinked, crouching low behind the screen to avoid discovery. She found a crevice in the screen through which she could command a good view of the room. Dundon was already jerking down the window curtains.

A moment later he stood before the safe, his fumbling hands searching through his pockets. Mary drew a sharp breath as she recognized the yellow slip of paper he finally brought out. It was the sheet on which she had written numbers at random.

She clutched the handle of her revolver tensely as Dundon turned toward the washstand and started forward. Mary waited breathlessly, fearing momentary discovery. Dundon, evidently changing his mind, turned quickly and knelt in front of the safe, holding the slip of paper before him and turning the knob as he read off the numbers.

Mary felt that she must do something, but nothing suggested itself. She ought to call up Mr. Rayner and get him there at once. Dundon's intentions were evident at last, and it was time to act. She knew it would be possible to slip through the door and into a telephone

booth in the outer office, but she wanted to wait until Dundon had grown more interested in the work of solving the combination.

A deep frown appeared in Dundon's forehead as he squatted before the safe door and turned the knob. He muttered to himself, and then began again in an effort to master the problem which evaded him. At last he stood up and wiped his perspiring forehead with a handkerchief in his trembling hand.

"Wrong combination," he growled.

A thrill of satisfaction flashed through Mary as she touched the paper bearing the right combination, still concealed in her belt. She was satisfied that Dundon would never get that; but suddenly a fearful thought came to her. What if Dundon should leave in disgust, deciding to try again on another day. The puzzled expression on his face proved that he was debating the situation.

Evidently deciding at last that opportunities to get away with $12,000 did not come every day, Dundon drew a deep sigh and knelt before the safe again. He had no sooner started to twirl the knob than Mary slipped softly out of the office, keeping the screen between herself and Dundon. She tiptoed lightly to a telephone in the outer office and closed the soundproof door upon her. An instant later she breathed tensely into the phone, calling the

Colony Club number. In half a minute Mr. Rayner was on the wire.

"This is Miss Dangerfield," she said rapidly. "Come to the office at once."

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Rayner in surprise.

"The safe is being robbed. Come! Bring the police!"

She hung up the receiver abruptly and, with a feeling of relief, stepped quietly out of the booth and returned with cautious tread to the private office. She managed to slip behind the screen again just as Dundon straightened up after a second futile attempt at mastering the combination.

Mary watched him narrowly through the crevice in the screen. She hoped that he would try the combination again, but instead of that he turned to Mr. Rayner's desk and, selecting a key from a ring he took from his pocket, he unlocked one of the drawers and searched through a collection of papers as though hunting for another memorandum of the combination. Mary could not get a good view of him, so she changed her position to the edge of the screen, and as she did so her hand brushed against a soap dish on the stand and it fell to the floor with a clatter.

Dundon drew back his searching hand sharply and turned to stare at the screen. Mary sprang

forth from her hiding-place, believing her chances would be better in the open.

Dundon took a step backward as he recognized her. "You!" he hissed.

"Yes!" cried Mary, raising the revolver and aiming it at him.

Dundon's face went white. He glanced shiftily around for something to use as a weapon. Finding nothing, he exclaimed abruptly, "Well, what's the matter?"

"I suppose you don't know," Mary flashed sarcastically.

"What are you doing here?" He attempted to turn suspicion on her.

"I came to see if you could work the combination of the safe," answered Mary coolly, keeping the revolver level with an effort. Her voice rang out confidently, and she was surprised to find herself so steady in the crisis.

For a moment there was silence. The two stood measuring each other with their eyes.

"Go ahead and shoot, why don't you!" cried Dundon with sudden bravado, as he saw the revolver tremble in Mary's hand for an unguarded instant.

"You wouldn't be worth the bullet," answered Mary spiritedly, steadying her hand.

"Well, then, why don't you put that silly thing down?" asked Dundon.

"Because I want to see how long you can stand there and try to brave this thing out."

Realizing that he was to be given a little time, Dundon again gazed about the rom. He felt that for the moment he was safe and that meantime some chance of escape would present itself. The color returned to his face, his taut muscles relaxed.

"Well, I guess I can stand waiting if you can," he said with a new note of insolence.

Mary did not choose to answer. They stood facing each other in silence. The only noise in the room was the ticking of the clock, which rang very loud in Mary's ears as she realized how long it would be before help would come. The minute hand crept slowly, measuring off five minutes, finally eight. Mary's arm was a dead weight. She lowered the revolver to her waist and pressed it firmly against her side to stop the quivering of her hand. Meanwhile she prayed that Mr. Rayner would arrive.

Taking advantage of an instant's preoccupation on Mary's part, Dundon spun about and darted to the wall, snapping off the electric light. Mary leaped forward and thrust the muzzle of the revolver at his shadowy form as he darted past.

"Don't shoot!" screamed Dundon, stopping instantly.

With her left hand Mary groped along the

wall, found the electric push-button and pressed it.

Again they stood face to face. This time Dundon huddled against his desk, his teeth chattering, his eyes fixed wide in terror.

Mary shifted the revolver to her left hand and opened and closed the fingers of her right in an effort to ease the cramp in them. A moment later she brushed the hand wearily across her face.

Dundon took advantage of the movement. Knocking aside the revolver, he sprang at her.

"Keep back!" cried Mary, striking at him with the pistol, and covering the electric button with her shoulders. "I'll shoot!" she screamed an instant later as Dundon's tense fingers bit into her arm. His other hand clutched her left wrist. She sprang to one side, knocking over the screen, and trying to throw Dundon against the porcelain wash basin. Clinging to the revolver, she fought with feline fierceness. Her muscles, hardened by the outdoor life on Moseses Island, were more than a match for Dundon's flabby biceps. Neither spoke, but both panted with the violent exertion.

Mary prayed that the revolver would not go off. She clung to it chiefly to keep Dundon from gaining possession of it. Whirling about and straining to evade her frantic lunges, Dundon struggled to wrest the weapon from her.

Gradually her muscles relaxed. Dundon began to get the upper hand. He fought like a wild man, his insane fury more than a match for Mary's will-power.

Unable to reach the revolver, he changed his tactics abruptly and slipped his right hand from Mary's arm to her throat. She felt his fingers tightening and scratched at them with her free hand, but her efforts were unavailing. Making the most of the strangle hold, Dundon bent her head backward, thrusting it farther and farther, until it jarred against the wall. A flash of red appeared before Mary's eyes, blotting out everything in the room but Dundon's ugly, demoniacal face. An instant later everything went black. Mary's energies were spent; she could not rally; a sickening sensation seized her, she knew that she was falling. In that moment she crashed to the floor and felt one of Dundon's knees pinioning her chest. With both hands free, he reached for the revolver.

Then, just as Mary was losing consciousness, she heard distinctly the sound of rapid steps rushing down a corridor in the outside office.

CHAPTER X

AN OPPORTUNITY

At the sound of the steps in the outer office Dundon jumped to his feet, kicked the revolver from Mary's hand and stooped quickly to recover it. When he straightened up again he faced four men—Mr. Rayner, Mr. Willis and two policemen. They rushed upon him.

Mary screamed as she heard the click of Dundon's revolver. She closed her eyes to escape seeing the result of the shot, but no report came. As her eyes blinked open again she saw hazily that the two policemen had thrown themselves upon Dundon and knocked the revolver to the floor.

Mr. Rayner picked it up and, with a quizzical look in his surprised eyes, held it toward Willis.

"You see, it was not even loaded," he said. "I have kept it in my office for twenty years, I guess."

Mary slowly rose to her feet, gasping as she realized that if Dundon had known there was no cartridge in the revolver he could have overpowered her easily and made his escape.

Willis rushed to help her. "You are all right?" he cried anxiously.

"Yes," breathed Mary, forcing a brave little smile, "but I feel faint."

"Here," cried Willis, snatching a towel from the corner rack and wetting it under the faucet. He pressed it against her forehead.

"Oh! that feels good," exclaimed Mary, refreshed by the cool contact. "I am quite all right now."

She turned to the others in the room and saw Dundon standing between the two policemen, handcuffed, his head hanging in sullen shame.

"What is all this about?" asked Mr. Rayner, stepping up to Mary, and looking anxiously into her flushed face. "Does it mean that Dundon was trying to break into the safe?"

"It certainly does," answered Mary. "I told you this afternoon that I suspected something was wrong. When Mr. Dundon knocked over your coat it was only a ruse by which he obtained a copy of the combination in the book." She pulled the numbered yellow slip from her belt and showed it to Mr. Rayner. "That's the combination, isn't it?"

The real estate man slowly read the figures and then compared them with those in his memorandum. "That's it," he said.

"I found that scrawled on the pad hanging

by the towel rack here," answered Mary. "I tore it off and wrote another series of numbers at random in place of it. If that idea had not occurred to me, Mr. Dundon would not have had so much trouble in trying to work the combination to-night and probably he would have gotten away."

"You mean Dundon really returned to the office this evening and tried to work the combination?" asked Mr. Rayner, looking from Mary to his confidential clerk.

"That's it," answered Mary.

"How about it, Dundon?" queried Mr. Rayner sharply.

The confidential man made no reply. His guilt was written on his face.

"Take him away," ordered Mr. Rayner abruptly.

Relieved that it was all over and that she had vindicated herself, Mary sank down on her chair, while Mr. Rayner followed the policemen and their prisoner through the front office. Willis, remaining alone in the room with Mary, stepped softly to her side and extended his hand.

"You're awfully brave," he said. "I don't believe many girls would have dared remain in the office alone to catch a safe breaker."

"Now that it is all over," said Mary with a shivery laugh, "I am rather glad it happened.

Business is even more strenuous than acting, I find."

Willis smiled. "You are not at all the sort that looks for trouble, but you seem to get a lot of it," he answered.

"How did you happen to come with Mr. Rayner?" asked Mary abruptly, having taken his presence for granted until the question suddenly occurred to her.

"I happened to be at the Colony Club with him," was Willis's reply. "He came in to excuse himself after receiving your phone message and I insisted on coming along, and now I am glad I did."

"So am I," answered Mary, looking into his fine eyes, full of anxious concern for her.

"You must get home and have a good long rest now," said Willis.

He picked up the telephone from Mr. Rayner's desk and ordered a taxi. A moment later he was bundling Mary into his own warm overcoat, in spite of her protests, and urging thoughtful suggestions about her taking care of herself. As they passed through the office they met Mr. Rayner returning after seeing the policemen out.

"You certainly are a plucky girl," exclaimed the real estate man, taking Mary's hands in his and pressing them in thanks. "You surely saved $12,000 for the firm to-night."

"Oh," laughed Mary. "I don't believe I am as important as you two try to make out. You treat me as though I were a princess instead of a stenographer."

"You deserve any good treatment you get," beamed Mr. Rayner. "Now I don't want you to come down to the office for a week. We can get along without you, though it will be hard. You must rest up."

"Oh, no," answered Mary, "I will be all right after I get something to eat."

"Good gracious," exclaimed Willis, "I didn't think about your being hungry. You sat in this office from two o'clock till nine without a bite to eat. Come along now, I am going to see that you get something. Will you join us, Rayner?"

"No, thank you," answered Mr. Rayner, "I am going back to the office and go over Dundon's books carefully. Send my car home, Willis, or better still, use it yourself and send it here around one or two o'clock, whenever you get through with it."

"All right," answered Willis, lighting a match to guide Mary down the dark stairway to the ground floor.

Dismissing the taxi he had ordered, Willis helped Mary into Mr. Rayner's machine and told the chauffeur to drive to Delmonico's.

"But I am not dressed to go to such a place," gasped Mary.

"Clothes don't make any difference," answered Willis. "If you are afraid people will look at you, we will get a quiet corner on one of the upper floors where there won't be anybody at this time. We will leave before the theater crowd comes."

Mary could only consent. Any invitation from Willis was acceptable, he was always so thoughtful and considerate.

She relaxed completely as she sat beside him, feeling a glow of warmth in his presence and disappointed when the ride came to an abrupt end before the brightly lighted restaurant. Willis helped Mary out and through the carriage entrance to an elevator which whizzed them to a floor where they found a quiet nook at a softly lighted table and gave their order to an attentive waiter.

Mary, unfamiliar with the elaborate menu placed before her, asked Willis to order for her. He chose a simple and satisfying dinner with the taste of a connoisseur.

Mary had never eaten such dishes; she lingered over them appreciatively, talking with Willis, and feeling quite at ease in the unaccustomed surroundings.

They returned to a discussion of the attempted safe robbery, Willis telling Mary en-

thusiastically how different she was from most girls in an emergency.

"Instead of getting out of trouble like most people do, you look for it," he smiled.

"There is nothing in the world I like better than an adventure of some sort," answered Mary.

"Business is really too tame for you, you ought to be a militant suffragette; a labor leader; strike breaker, or detective." Willis's lips curled whimsically as he gazed dreamily across the table at her glowing face and bright halo of golden hair.

"Oh, that's just what I'd like," cried Mary. "I'd like to deliver a message to Garcia, or almost anywhere else. I want to do something exciting; I want to sample all kinds of different life, and I want the biggest samples cut."

She had never told Willis all that she suspected about her real station in life. She could not tell him now, that the mystery connected with her childhood caused the unrest which made her seek everywhere for experience in life. It was her hope that in some way, by learning the world, she would stumble upon a clue to her parentage, she would learn why Billy Peart occasionally received sums of money, the origin of which was doubtful. She ceased speaking to Willis and followed the thought

musingly. Gazing around the sumptuous dining room, she felt strangely at home, as though at last she were in the sphere to which she had been born.

Willis interrupted her thoughts with the exclamation, "Would you really like to learn a new side of life?"

"That's my ambition," she answered confidently.

"And after struggling so hard to learn to use shorthand and the typewriter, you would give it all up to undertake something new?" There seemed to be a serious thought behind his questioning.

"Oh, I'd love to," cried Mary spiritedly. "The office work will be awfully dull now that Dundon is gone. There won't be the daily excitement of having my work spoiled, and having somebody to watch. I really think I would make a good detective after this experience." She smiled.

"But I thought you wanted to be a business woman."

"I do, but it's so confining. I'd like to try something new." Her eyes were large and luminous with thoughts of the future.

Willis smiled warmly to himself as he considered the forceful ambition of the unsatisfied country girl who had made her way unaided in the city.

"And you'd be willing to leave your desk, after Mr. Rayner has come to depend upon you as though you were his right hand?"

"It would be hard," answered Mary, "but after all, I've got something to do in this life. I can feel it in my bones. I don't think I'd ever be a big success in the real estate business."

Willis leaned across the gleaming cloth and fixed his gaze upon hers. "I believe I can suggest something very exciting; it's along the line of detective work, but a good deal more dangerous," he said.

"Oh, tell me about it," cried Mary.

"Well, the worst of it is, it's a diplomatic job—sort of secret service," answered Willis, "and if you accept the commission, you'll have to go it blind; but it means a trip abroad."

"To Europe?" Mary exclaimed, with a catch in her voice.

"Yes, across the water on a great big steamship. How would you like that?" He looked into her beaming eyes and read the answer.

"I used to dream of what it would be," said Mary slowly, toying with a bit of pastry on her plate. "Sometimes we saw real ocean liners in the bay, but I never dreamed that I would live to go across on one. There is nothing in the world I would like better than sailing on a big boat."

"Well, then it's settled. I can get the com-

mission for you, but you will have to start very soon."

"The sooner the better," answered Mary.

"Then you'd better be getting home and resting up, because the work I'm suggesting will require all the vigor and vitality you can command."

Mary pushed back her chair and rose, a clinging smile on her lips in appreciation of Willis's confidence in her.

"I'll talk the thing over with the people who are going to select the agent to go abroad on this diplomatic errand," said Willis, as they went down in the elevator. "I will suggest your name, and I have some influence with them, so there is little question in my mind but that they will send you."

"I am all excited to know what it is," answered Mary.

"But you must wait till morning, and even then I am afraid they won't let me tell you much. If you make good on this it may lead to something far more profitable and pleasurable than regular business. I think it will just suit your temperament."

Willis took Mary home in Mr. Rayner's automobile, managing with much difficulty to dodge her insistent questioning on the new adventure.

Alone in her room Mary sat on the bed for a full hour, day-dreaming, without a thought of

sleep. She could hardly control her expectancy and wished for morning at once.

It was nearly noon next day when Willis came with a friend and found Mary waiting for him. She had not gone to the office, in view of the new work.

"This is Miss Dangerfield, Mr. Hartridge." Willis introduced the smooth-faced, well-dressed little man who accompanied him. "You will find her alert, courageous and venturesome."

"This is a very delicate mission," remarked Mr. Hartridge, scanning Mary with evident approval. "There are a great many risks attached to it. Are you willing to undertake them?"

"Why, yes," answered Mary.

"Then I don't see any reason why we can't settle this matter right now." The little man glanced toward the open parlor door, which Willis closed immediately. "Now this is all you have to do," Hartridge continued abruptly, drawing a compact envelope from his breast pocket. "You are to take a boat to Liverpool to-morrow, carrying this sealed letter." He turned the packet over in his smooth fingers and showed her two red seals affixed to it. "You must not open this envelope until you have left the ship."

"But why is everything so secret?" asked Mary.

"Because if you know all about the mission you are going on you are apt to give yourself away by acting suspiciously or self-consciously. The chances are, without knowing anything about it you will appear much more natural," replied Hartridge. "There are government agents who may get on your trail, so all you have to do is guard this letter and be careful about speaking to strangers. When you have left the ship in Liverpool, open the letter and read the instructions. That's all."

"But it doesn't sound very dangerous," remarked Mary, a little disappointed.

"There is plenty of danger in it," said Willis soberly, "but I wouldn't have suggested for a minute that you go if I hadn't felt perfectly confident that you would enjoy any difficulties that might arise, and manage to get out of them."

Willis's look was full of personal concern, and Mary flushed a little as she read the admiration in his eyes.

A moment later Mr. Hartridge handed Mary an envelope containing her steamship ticket and a thousand dollars in traveler's checks. "That will take care of the expense, and on your return there will be another thousand dollars waiting for you."

Mary gasped at mention of the amount. The money, more than anything else, made her think seriously for a moment of the impulsive step

she was taking. She only hoped that she would be able to earn it.

Mr. Hartridge left at once, and Willis stayed to discuss the details of preparation for the trip.

"I must let Mr. Rayner know right away that I can't return to the office," said Mary.

"I have attended to that already," answered Willis. "Rayner is sorry to give you up, but he admits that you are too big for the place and is glad you have an opportunity to do something you will enjoy more."

Mary discussed the question of clothes with Willis and finally they decided that two suits of inconspicuous cut and color should form the principal part of her wardrobe, with perhaps two or three simple, inexpensive gowns for evening wear.

Mary went to luncheon with Willis at an exclusive little restaurant on Fifth Avenue and afterwards enjoyed his company as they made a tour of the shops and selected her clothes. Willis's taste matched hers, and together they made an excellent choice of apparel.

After the shopping excursion Mary went home and retired early with a pleasant, lingering memory of the gay afternoon with Willis. She looked forward eagerly to the promise of next day, vowing to herself that she would prove worthy of Willis's faith in her.

CHAPTER XI

AT SEA

WHEN the great liner *Sargosse* steamed out of New York harbor Mary stood alone at the rail, waving her wet handkerchief to Willis, who was gradually becoming an indistinct figure at the end of the dock. The bustle and excitement of leaving had aroused strange emotions in her; she quivered with excitement, impulsive tears springing to her eyes as she realized she was leaving America. Under one arm she clutched a large bunch of beautiful roses, which Willis had pressed upon her at parting. She bathed her face in the fresh, dewy bouquet and, drawing a deep breath, turned her radiant face toward the open sea.

Willis had cautioned her to stay on deck during the first few hours. He had told her not to go down to her stuffy stateroom until she had become accustomed to the motion of the boat. Mary had laughed at his advice; she knew she would not be seasick.

She walked back and forth on the deck, enjoying the water, watching the gulls that

swooped about in circling drifts like huge snowflakes. The old familiar tang of salt sea air was in her nostrils; she threw back her shoulders and took deep draughts of ozone that made her tingle to her finger-tips. When, at last, she was tired, she had her deck chair carried to a sheltered corner, where she sat with eyes musingly half closed, until the ship's bugler sounded the first call for dinner.

Mary went to her stateroom and slipped on a simple evening gown. She took from the black bag she had carried on deck that afternoon the letter with which she had been intrusted, and thrust it into her waist, securing it with a safety pin.

As she touched the heavy envelope and read the line scrawled across it: "Not to be opened until after you have left the ship," her curiosity was piqued and she was tempted to tear open the seals; but her hand hesitated. Thrilling with a mingling of adventurous feelings, she went down to the dining saloon and found her place at a side table with three other passengers.

During dinner Mary only spoke when addressed by her companions at the table, who carried on a general conversation. She wanted to ask questions and take a lively part in the interesting talk, which turned on foreign cities, shops and boats, but Mr. Hartridge's advice was

uppermost in her mind and she knew she must say nothing to strangers.

After dinner Mary went on deck alone and strolled to the stern, where she watched the phosphorescent lights churned up by the big propellers. As she looked down into the murky waters the memory of Moseses Island came back to her. She wondered what Cap'n Jogifer was doing? How Aunt Liza was? Whether Billy Peart was searching for her or not? She could imagine the expression on their faces if they could see her now, standing at the rail of a great ocean liner. She smiled to herself at the oddity of it all. A year ago she had not even dreamed of ever crossing the ocean and now she was really doing it, and it seemed entirely natural.

Mary enjoyed every minute of the six days the trip lasted. She did not look forward to land for a moment. All she wanted to do was sit on the deck and dream in her pleasant world, bounded by water.

But at last land was sighted, sharp, jagged rocks came into view, thrusting up through the sea like giants' teeth.

"Oh, there are the Needles!" cried a tourist who was standing beside Mary.

Mary's idea of geography was hazy. She had never heard of any rocks called the "Needles," but she thought they were rightly

named. She saw another passenger point to a smooth slope in the distance and exclaim, "The Isle of Wight!" She had heard of that and knew that the land beyond it and to the left must be the southern shore of England.

The boat passed through Southampton Water and a tug piloted it to dock. Mary's heart fluttered as she looked for the first time upon a foreign city. She clung tightly to the little black hand-bag containing the precious letter, and took her place with those who were waiting at the gangplank to be first ashore. Her baggage had been checked through to London, so her hands and mind would be free to protect the letter.

She trembled with a feeling of elation as the gangplank was shoved out. So far, her trip had been a success. She had hardly spoken to anyone on board and had completed the greater part of her journey without arousing the suspicions of anyone who might have been sent to watch her. Her throat contracted nervously as she realized that in a few hours she would be actively engaged in fulfilling the orders contained in the letter. She burned to know the mysterious reason behind it all and her fingers itched to tear open the letter and find out at once. But she knew she must wait until a securer place and a safer time.

As she gazed down at the crowd of people on

the dock, most of whom awaited friends, Mary suddenly singled out the face of a man who stared at her. His mustache, turned up and pointed like the Emperor of Germany's, accentuated a military bearing. His cold, gray eyes met Mary's, and she caught a cruel glint in them. She took only a passing interest in the well-dressed German; but once he had seen her, he only shifted his eyes from hers for a moment to glance at a telegram he had just received, which read:

Watch for pretty, golden-haired girl, wearing light gray, tailored Norfolk suit, and small black hat. She has the document.
V.

As Mary rushed down the gangplank with the crowd of people hurrying off, she looked ahead to the railway station and smiled as she saw the strange little train that was to carry her to London. It was so unlike anything she had ever seen in America. The engine, puffing and snorting, made her think of a boy's toy, with its small smokestack, resembling a stovepipe, and its shrill little whistle. The compartment coaches also seemed like toys. Mary was afraid they were too small for anyone to ride in, until a guard helped her on to the running board of one of the coaches and opened the door for her. Mary saw inside a very comfortable little com-

partment, containing two upholstered seats facing each other.

"If I shut my eyes I could imagine this was my stateroom," thought Mary to herself, as she settled down in a corner and experienced for the first time the dizzy sensation of "landsickness."

The guard closed the door after her and Mary drew a long breath of anticipation as she realized that at last she was alone and privileged to open the letter. Her fingers sought the red seals and she broke them off, tearing open the envelope, only to find a second envelope also carefully sealed. With it was a folded sheet of letter paper which read:

Guard the sealed envelope as you would your life. It contains a secret which other governments would like to learn. Open it when you reach your hotel in London.

Mary was disappointed. She had hoped for some definite information. Now she knew little more than before; yet the note had served to emphasize the serious importance of her errand.

She felt the train move and realized with a thrill that she was on her way to London, alone in the compartment, and certain of success. But at that moment a rattling of the door knob caused her to raise her eyes. She saw the red cap of a guard through the window. He pushed open the door, and Mary shrank back into her

corner as she recognized the German military man, whose face had attracted her attention on the dock.

He entered the car and slipped into the seat opposite her. The guard closed the door, locked it and jumped off the running board. On glancing through the window, Mary realized that the train had already pulled out of the station and was running along smoothly, at fair speed.

Suddenly, as she saw the man watching her closely, Mary recalled the letter which lay open on her lap beside the sealed envelope. Picking it up, she started to thrust it hastily into her hand-bag, when the man remarked in a pleasant voice, with a German inflection, "You have brought nothing to read on the journey but a letter, I see."

Mary bit her lip and turned away, trying to fathom the reason for her fellow-traveler's impertinence. Nervously she slipped the sealed envelope into her hand-bag and snapped the lock shut, carefully placing the bag between herself and the window. A moment later she glanced up at the stranger as he leaned toward her. He shifted his gaze to the window and remarked, "We are out of the city now and on the Downs." After a swift glance at her bag he looked straight into her eyes and said curtly, "You will kindly give me that letter now, Madam."

Mary clutched the bag in instant terror.

"Oh, it's all right," he smiled reassuringly. "Don't be frightened. They did not tell you, of course, but I had orders to meet you. I am in the United States Secret Service."

"You . . . are . . ." faltered Mary.

"A government agent." He smiled again.

"But how do I know that?" she flashed, clinging to the bag instinctively.

"If I were not in the same service with you how would I know all about your errand; how would I be able to recognize you?" he asked pointedly.

Mary hesitated about answering. She was puzzled by his evident knowledge. He seemed to know more about her mission than she did. His manner was business-like and frank.

But the words: "A secret which other governments would like to learn"—flashed into her mind. Though the man spoke English, his accent was foreign. He was certainly not an American. Yet Mary felt that she must not be too sure.

"Are you an American?" she asked.

"No, I am a European."

"Then how——"

"Because the United States seldom employs Americans to do its work abroad. You ought to know that foreigners are engaged in that work."

Mary suspected his explanation. He seemed

to think she was employed in the Secret Service Department of the government. If he were really what he claimed to be, he should know that she was an independent agent.

"But I have no idea of what you are talking about," replied Mary suddenly, looking at him coldly, resolved to brave the thing out. "This letter is a private matter. What is all this talk about the Secret Service and its agents?"

Evidently annoyed by the reply, the German leaned forward and spoke with emphasis; "I had verbal instructions to get that letter from you. Now let's not have any more play-acting."

Mary shook her head slowly and smiled with exasperating coolness. Intuition and common sense told her the man was playing a game, and was not what he represented himself to be.

"I am sorry I cannot recognize your instructions," she said firmly. "I do not know you, and I don't know what you're talking about. If you say any more, I shall call the conductor."

The man smiled, realizing that Mary was ignorant of the make-up of English trains.

"Do you mean you refuse to give me that letter?" His manner changed, a deep frown furrowed his forehead.

Mary nodded.

His face grew hard, his eyes glinted. Stealthily he moved toward her.

Mary, her heart thumping madly, sprang to

her feet. She stood with her back to the door and held the bag behind her, looking up to find the emergency signal cord. Locating it, her right hand shot toward it, when the German, guessing her intention, darted forward and caught her wrist. Mary bent backward, struggling to free herself. The man's grip was like a vise; she could not move.

"Now give me that letter before I am compelled to take it from you," the German hissed, thrusting his red face close to hers. Mary felt his hot breath on her cheek and, bracing herself against the door, summoned all her energies into a frantic shove which sent the man reeling back a few feet. But before she could jerk her wrist loose and grasp the cord he had seized her again and was struggling to gain possession of the hand-bag.

At that moment, however, a sudden application of the brakes threw them both off balance; the train was slowing down for a station. With a frantic look over his shoulder the German realized the situation and released his hold on Mary's wrist. Backing against the door opening on the station side, he effectively blocked the entrance.

Mary, losing her balance as she was abruptly released, toppled into the seat at the other end of the compartment. The train came to a stop. The door was thrown open and Mary saw a

guard on the running board, facing the German. The German offered a coin and spoke to the guard in a whisper.

As Mary hesitated for a moment, debating whether to spring forward and try to rush past the man and get out of the car or scream for help, the voice of the guard came to her. "Sorry, sir," he said, motioning the German aside, "the train is crowded. You will have to make room for this gentleman."

The German, with clenched fists, and a muttered word, dropped down into his seat to make room for a kindly-faced man in black, whose appearance was that of a clergyman.

Mary, feeling secure in the presence of a third person, remained in her seat and slowly recovered her breath and composure as the door was closed again and the train pulled out. She scanned the face of the newcomer. His eyes peered benevolently over heavily rimmed spectacles set evenly between fuzzy little side-whiskers. His appearance inspired confidence. He looked with mild interest at Mary and the young man; then fussily bestowed his luggage and took from one of the bags a book.

Mary sank back into her seat with a sigh of relief. She watched the clergyman, sitting across from her, a lunch box on his knee and the book in his hand. He began at once to read, and presently munched a sandwich.

Mary knew that she was safe for the time being. But the problem of getting rid of her enemy after reaching London began to trouble her. She realized that he was dangerous and clever. She wondered how he had managed to pick her from the whole shipload and secure a seat in the same compartment of the train.

Such a man would certainly not give up until he obtained the letter. Mary wondered if on reaching London she had better appeal to the police for protection. But evidently that would be against the interests of her mission. Secrecy was the chief factor, and she must not put herself in any position where she might have to tell her story.

As she sat thinking, the clergyman's eyes suddenly twinkled in her direction. He was gazing at her with a whimsical smile of interest. Impulsively she returned his smile. His fatherly manner won her confidence instantly. He beamed back at her, reached into his lunch box and drew out a sandwich, remarking as he extended it: "Won't you have one of my sandwiches?"

Mary was more hungry for companionship than food, but she accepted the sandwich and nibbled at it while the clergyman engaged her in conversation. They discussed the weather, the fog and sundry commonplaces. To Mary it was a delightful relief to talk to anybody; it

helped her forget the German, who sat stolidly in his corner watching every move over the top of his newspaper.

Before they had reached London, Mary was on intimate footing with the fatherly clergyman. When the train rolled into Waterloo Station, she looked up in surprise to ask, " Is this really London, already? I have enjoyed the trip so, I hardly noticed we were moving."

" Yes, this is dear old London," answered the clergyman, with a quaint smile, gathering his bags and boxes together. He glanced nervously at Mary and asked abruptly, " Someone is meeting you here, I presume? "

" Why, no," said Mary, turning toward the German doubtfully, hoping the clergyman would offer to take her to a hotel. She was not afraid, but the thought of looking for a place to stay in a strange city was perplexing.

" May I ask where you are going? " queried the little man in black, looking up with anxious eyes.

" Why, to some hotel," answered Mary.

" But that is so indefinite. Which hotel, if I may make so bold? " was the kindly query.

" Good gracious, I don't know," said Mary. " The nearest one to the station, I suppose." She had the names of two hotels which Willis had given her, but she did not want to repeat them before the German; hoping that by going

off in a cab with the clergyman, he would lose her trail.

"If you like," suggested the minister, "I can take you to a hotel near the Strand, where you will feel quite at home."

"Thank you," said Mary, stepping to the platform, as the train came to a stop.

The clergyman helped her claim her luggage and had it loaded on to a four-wheeler, with his bags. Mary kept her eyes open for the German, but he had disappeared in the crowd as soon as the train stopped. She felt that he would follow, and thought it best to give her companion some idea of the situation, in the hope that he could suggest something helpful.

"Listen," exclaimed Mary, in her breezy, American manner, which must have been startling to the provincial clergyman, "I want to find a place where I'll be very safe. I think the bigger the hotel is, the better. I have the names of two here," she produced the card on which Willis had written sundry helpful directions. "I have a notion that the man who was in the coach with us will try to find out where I am going, and I want to keep him from it if possible."

The clergyman's eyes widened as he read on the card Mary handed him the names of the two most prominent hotels in London.

"But it will cost you a fortune to stay at one

of these places, my dear," he said. "A boarding house on Russell Square would be better."

"But I wouldn't feel as safe there," answered Mary. "I am here on business, and I think I had better stop at a good hotel."

"On business, my dear? A beautiful young woman like you, who should be married and settled down in a quiet home in the country? Why, what is the world coming to?" The minister shook his head repeatedly and fell to musing to himself, probably constructing the framework of a sermon on the iniquities of modern business. Mary knew it would be hopeless to explain to him that she enjoyed the adventure.

Placing Mary in charge of a doorman in splendid livery on their arrival at the hotel, the clergyman patted her on the shoulder and said, "Good-by," giving her his card, which read: "The Right Reverend Cooper Jones, Canonshire, England."

Mary thanked him and hurried into the hotel, hoping that she had evaded the German and blissfully ignorant of the fact that a taxicab, carrying a young man with a stolid German face and a mustache brushed up at the ends, had followed close behind her four-wheeler all the way from Waterloo Station.

As soon as Mary had been assigned to a room on the second floor of the Strand hotel, she locked the door and opened her black hand-bag,

taking out the heavy envelope. Breaking its seals, she found a second note and another sealed envelope inclosed.

The note read:

Communicate at once with the Princess Ida, Blendon Palace. Write simply that you have the lost letter. Then await her orders.

Mary gasped. "A real princess! A lost letter!" These factors tinged her mission with romance. She could not sit still. Jumping up, she paced back and forth, wondering what the Princess would look like and how she should address her. Should she say: "My dear Madam?" How should she behave in the princessly presence? She wondered about the letter, too. What important secret could it contain? How did it get to America?

Stepping to the window, she looked down into the street, jammed with buses and taxicabs. On the corner opposite a square shouldered young man paced slowly up and down the walk. He looked like the German who had been in her compartment on the train. His military form was very familiar, but Mary could not see his face. Just then he turned, and she recognized him. Her breath caught convulsively as she realized that, not being satisfied with the encounter in the coach, he was still on her trail.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE GARDEN

LIEUTENANT NOEL STRAKEY, the foreign secret agent who was trailing Mary, did not catch sight of her as she looked out the window. He was busy watching the hotel entrance. He felt very sure that Mary would keep to her room for safety, and probably send out an errand boy with whatever message she had to dispatch. He proposed to intercept that message and learn what he could concerning the whereabouts of the letter his government had sent him after.

Mary's simplicity puzzled him. He did not know whether she was really unfamiliar with diplomatic wiles, or whether she was a shrewd government operative. Her plain common sense was beyond his understanding. He thought there must be something deep beneath her frank manner. The truth was that he could not make her out at all. He felt the need of advice, assistance possibly, in coping with this young woman. Taking a coin from his pocket, he beckoned to a street boy, who hurried up.

"Here's a shilling for you, kiddie," he said. "Run to No. 7 Easton Terrace and tell the serv-

ant that Lieutenant Strakey wants Madam Jolatsky. Have her come back here with you. She will understand." The lieutenant paused and smiled to the boy. "Have you got all that now?"

"Yes, sir. No. 7 Easton Terrace, sir. Madam Jolatsky wants to see Lieutenant Strakey."

"No, it's the other way around," said the lieutenant, as the boy started off.

He returned to his slow pacing and watched the hotel entrance until a taxi drew up at the corner. His messenger jumped out, followed by a tall, strikingly handsome woman in a blue velvet dress and picture hat.

Strakey bowed. "Ah, madame," he said in French. "What do you think?"

"You have it already?" she asked eagerly.

"No; worse luck. I almost got it on the train, but a confounded parson was let into the compartment. I saw it, though."

Madam Jolatsky's eyes indicated that, in her opinion, had the task been hers, it would have been better done. But she said merely: "Is she in the hotel?"

"Yes."

"Then you want me to get to her room?" She raised heavily penciled eyebrows inquiringly.

"Not yet. I want you to report the situation

to the Baron. Later, perhaps—but meantime I must watch the entrance here. I am expecting she will send out a boy with the letter."

Madam Jolatsky shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly. "Very well then," she said. "If you are certain you do not need assistance I shall report to the Baron." She got into the waiting taxi and was driven away.

Strakey was disappointed in the result of his conversation. He had meant to ask Madam Jolatsky's advice, but the hint of rivalry in her manner had irritated him and he had abruptly changed his mind. As he watched the door he hoped for the sight of a boy coming out with a letter. If he could intercept some message of Mary's he would probably be able to manage alone, without Madam Jolatsky's assistance.

Suddenly his trained, sharp eyes brightened as he saw a bell boy step through the hotel entrance, a letter in his hand. Strakey noted instantly that the letter bore no stamp, and concluded the boy was to deliver it in person.

As the youngster passed the corner Strakey stoped him, glancing at the letter, managed to read the name "Princess Ida" on it, and remarked quickly, "Ah, are you the boy with the letter from the young American lady?"

The messenger nodded. "It's very particular, sir," he said. "Sixpence extra if I am back in half an hour."

"Well, here's half a crown and you're back already," said Strakey engagingly, calmly taking the letter from the boy's hand. "The Princess Ida sent me for it."

The boy grinned and clutched the coin tightly. "I shall say nothing and get my sixpence, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, that's the idea," replied Strakey.

Calling a taxi, he drove to the Baron's house in the West End. There he found his principal with Madam Jolatsky, seated at a writing table in a lofty paneled library. He placed the unopened letter in the Baron's hand.

The Baron frowned for a moment, then tore the envelope open and smiled broadly. A little later he stood up and rapidly dictated a reply to Mary's intercepted letter, which Madam Jolatsky transcribed in a slanting, fashionable hand on a heavy sheet of crested notepaper.

Having recognized Strakey as he stood on the corner, Mary promptly withdrew from the window, wrote a note to the Princess and dispatched the boy with it. Feeling sure of a reply before evening, and thinking it would be risky to leave her room, she sat down to wait; drawing a chair near the window and looking down into the crowded street. Strakey had disappeared. She hoped that was a favorable sign, though she felt shaky with suppressed excitement. The ex-

pectation of meeting a princess was intoxicating. She could hardly wait for an answer.

Half an hour later there was a tap at her door. "Buttons" appeared, smiling, and announced, "I delivered the note, ma'am. The half hour is just up."

"You gave it to Princess Ida herself?" asked Mary, fumbling in her purse for the promised sixpence.

"Yes, ma'am." The boy lied neatly, taking the money and bowing himself into the hall.

"She gave you no reply?" asked Mary, stopping him for a moment.

"No, you'll get that later."

Reassured by the boy's answer, Mary returned to waiting. She occupied her time by writing a letter to Willis, giving him a graphic description of the pleasures of the ocean voyage and telling of the exciting encounter on the train.

In less than an hour a second tap came at the door and Mary opened to find "Buttons" extending a letter on a silver salver.

She tore open the envelope, her eyes lingering for a moment on the heavy crest at the top of the correspondence sheet.

Holding her breath, she read:

MISS MARY DANGERFIELD, HOTEL REX, STRAND, LONDON, E. C. Your note received. Am so glad success has attended you thus far. I am sending my motor at once to bring you to me.

IDA, PRINCESS OF MESCHWITZ.

Mary read the note twice before she could really believe that a live princess had written to her and was sending her automobile to carry her to the castle. Mary felt it must be a castle, because a princess could hardly live anywhere else. She ran to the window and looked out. Sure enough! There was a stately limousine drawn up at the curb. Mary noted a gold crest emblazoned on the door. She snatched up her hat and thrust in the pins with trembling fingers. From her bag she took the sealed letter and pinned it inside her waist. Then she went down to the street, keeping a sharp lookout for Strakey.

A chauffeur wearing a visored cap, goggles and a dust coat with collar turned up, opened the tonneau door for her. A moment later Mary was lying back on the springy upholstered seat and wondering what it would be like to be a real princess, with a car at one's disposal, and any number of flunkies in gold uniforms. The car sped through the streets to the West End. There the chauffeur slowed down and turned into a winding street of expensive homes. A moment later he drew up before a large mansion, surrounded by a heavy iron fence inclosing a hedge.

A richly liveried footman helped Mary from the car and ushered her into the house. She walked up the marble steps and across the deep-

napped rugs in the hall as though in a dream. A feeling of elation possessed her and she was somewhat dazed by the surrounding magnificence.

She was led into a paneled room, where a man in a court uniform rose from a writing table to greet her. He bowed and asked: "Are you the young lady who wrote to the Princess about a certain letter?"

Mary nodded. The man turned to the footman and said: "Announce us."

The footman drew aside a purple velvet portière, disclosing the entrance to a second and larger room. Mary, the uniformed official at her side, followed the footman.

She found herself advancing toward a regal looking woman in the center of the room, who looked up with a pleased smile at her entrance. The Princess—for Mary recognized her rank by the deference the others showed—was a beautiful woman, splendidly gowned. Mary courtesied to her. The Princess extended a languid hand. Mary pressed it, not knowing that she was expected merely to kiss the slender white fingers.

"You have brought me a letter." The Princess spoke slowly.

"Yes," said Mary, hesitantly. Again the Princess extended her slender white hand. Mary caught an expectant movement on the

part of the uniformed man who had accompanied her to the room. She became conscious of an atmosphere of strange tension. Something suddenly made her doubt the authority of the Princess and the genuineness of those about her. She was troubled by an indefinable doubt.

The splendor of the room was reassuring. There could be no mistake. She took the letter from her waist and handed it to the Princess; then, as if fearful of what she had done, stood hesitant.

The Princess, fingering the letter nervously, smiled and bowed. Mary courtesied, realizing that she was being dismissed. And she was loath to go without a further word. Doubts returned in spite of efforts to convince herself that everything was regular.

Turning for a moment, she glanced through the window to the street and saw the chauffeur standing beside the car in which she had come. He had removed his goggles to rub his eyes, his collar was turned down. In that instant Mary recognized the chauffeur as the man who had attacked her on the train and followed her to her hotel.

She had been trapped! This princess was no princess at all. The meaning of the whole situation came to her in a flash.

She was seized by a sudden impulse. Turn-

ing quickly to the Princess, Mary intercepted a curious smile that passed between the woman and the man in uniform. As though wishing to ask a favor of the Princess, Mary stepped forward and dropped to one knee. The Princess smiled tolerantly, wondering what the girl would ask.

Mary poised herself for an instant and then, pretending to lose her balance, sprang forward, snatched the letter from the woman's hand and darted from the room. She rushed through the halls and wrenched open the street door, plunging down the steps ahead of a number of shouting pursuers.

Strakey, standing on the sidewalk, disguised as a chauffeur, leaped toward her, rushing through the gate to prevent her from reaching the street. But Mary had not forgotten him. She turned from the walk, sped swiftly across the lawn and vaulted the high hedge. An automobile stood at the corner, a man sitting at the wheel. Mary, turning for an instant to see her pursuers tumbling through the gate, ran to the motor. She jumped in beside the surprised driver and cried breathlessly: "Start it, please! I'll give you fifty dollars if you get me away from those people!"

At the mention of money the man in the car, who worked for public hire, started his motor at once and they sped around the corner, just

as Strakey with several of his followers jumped into the big limousine and began pursuit.

"Hotel Rex! Take me there!" cried Mary, reaching into her purse and taking out a small handful of gold coin which she thrust into the driver's calloused palm.

He looked over his shoulder at the automobile giving chase and muttered, "If we can strike a straight stretch of road we'll beat them." Leaning over the wheel, he let out speed.

They turned into a street with great houses on one side and a cool green park on the other. Mary glanced back. The second machine was not half a block away.

"Turn into the park!" she cried.

"It is private!" shouted the driver in answer. "It belongs to the Princess Ida."

At mention of the name Mary reached forward and caught the steering wheel. She gave it a spin to the right and the machine turned into the spacious grounds. The driver grumbled, but Mary held one hand on the wheel and he had no choice but to continue along the Princess Ida's private road.

As they came to a stretch with high walls on either side, Mary looked back and found the limousine not fifty yards behind. She urged the driver to put on higher speed. The car flew.

Over the wall at the left Mary could see the turrets of a great house. She hoped it was the

Princess's. But just as she caught a glimpse of promised success, something happened. The motor stopped, whether through accident, or intent on the part of the driver who evidently feared arrest for encroaching on royal grounds, Mary did not know. She was certain, however, that the car was only coasting along under its own impetus and that time was pressing. The driver looked up at her helplessly.

"Do something!" shouted Mary. He shook his head. Mary looked about her. This narrow road was no place to face the enemy. She glanced at the brick wall on her left It was too high to climb; but at that moment she saw just ahead a heavy, twisted woodbine climbing in a corner of the wall. Possibly that would offer a hand hold by which she could climb to the top and drop to safety on the other side.

The car had already reached the point where the woodbine grew, and Mary, slipping to the running board, jumped off. She sprang to the wall, grasped the thick, woody stalk and pulled herself up, hand over hand. In a few seconds she had reached the broad top of the wall and, hesitating but a moment as she saw Strakey leap from his auto and run toward her, dropped to the ground on the other side.

She struck in a heap, but unmindful of the shock, struggled to her feet and dashed wildly through the dense shrubbery in which she had

fallen. Before reaching the open she heard the thud of Strakey's feet as he leaped from the wall in pursuit.

Panting with fear, Mary plunged on, gaining new energy as she saw through the shrubbery an open lawn just beyond. The crash of branches behind told her that Strakey was gaining. She had hardly reached the lawn when he burst through and caught her by the arm.

She stumbled and sank to her knees.

"The letter!" Strakey shouted in her ear. "Give it to me!" He was bending over her, murder in his eyes.

The sound of running feet came to Mary's ears. Clinging to the letter, which she had again concealed in her waist, she glanced up to see a group of people on the lawn nearby. Several of them had broken from the crowd and were rushing to aid her. She saw tables and chairs and gayly striped marquees, and realized that she must have broken in on a garden party.

Strakey's grip on her arm suddenly released. She saw him pushed back, as two stout men in gilt braided livery lifted her to her feet.

One of them exclaimed, "Get them out of this —quick!"

Strakey had already disappeared through the shrubbery and Mary felt herself being hustled after him, when behind her she heard a woman's voice, crying: "Stop!" in an imperious tone.

The servants released Mary and she turned about with them to face a slender and graceful woman, dressed in white, who asked in astonishment: "What is the meaning of this?"

"I was trying to get away. Someone told me these grounds belong to Princess Ida. Can you tell me where she is?" Mary's heart beat high in the hope that the aristocratic looking lady before her might be the Princess herself.

"What did you want to see the Princess about?" asked the lady.

"I have a letter for her," answered Mary. "The man who chased me was trying to get it."

"You have been put to a great deal of difficulty in delivering the letter," smiled the lady, holding out her hand. "Please give it to me."

Mary drew back, hesitating. It seemed that everyone wanted her letter, but this time she must make sure of delivering it into the right hands.

"I am the Princess Ida," came the quiet assurance from the pleasant little woman who still held out her hand.

At the sound of cracking twigs in the shrubbery Princess Ida turned to her bewildered servants and ordered: "Bring that man back!" At the word they darted after Strakey, like well trained dogs.

Mary was certain she had found the Princess at last. Dazed by her good fortune, she brought

the letter out slowly and handed it to the Princess, who opened it, glanced at the inclosure and crumpled it in her hand. Then, her face relaxing, she smiled to Mary, "Thank you very much."

Before Mary could reply, the servants returned, red-faced, with Strakey struggling between them.

"Ah, Lieutenant Strakey!" the Princess smiled coldly. "How thoughtless of you to put yourself in such a compromising position, racing after a young lady through my grounds. An attaché of the imperial government. It is delicious." She laughed.

Turning to Mary, she asked, "This man bothered you? He should be arrested?"

"Why, no!" exclaimed Mary, "I suppose he was only doing his duty, the same as I was."

"Then you would like to have him released?"

"If you please, Princess."

The Princess smiled in appreciation of Mary's prompt forgiveness, and signaled her servants to escort Lieutenant Strakey from the grounds.

"And now, my dear," said the Princess, with a kindly smile, "you deserve anything I can do for you. What shall it be? Will you join my garden party?"

Mary nodded and walked beside the Princess,

who asked pleasantly: "Do you know what my recovery of this letter means?"

"Why, no, not exactly," she answered. "I understood it had something to do with trouble between two nations."

"That's about it. A diplomatic friend of mine wrote me this letter, in which he was so indiscreet as to mention the plans of some revolutionists who wanted Great Britain to help overthrow the government which Lieutenant Strakey represents. The important letter was stolen, and in a few weeks a former servant sent a letter from America demanding a large sum of money for its safe return and admitting that he was already negotiating to sell the letter to the government most interested.

"I spoke to the American ambassador and he set certain forces to work securing the letter and arranging for its return to me."

The Princess stopped short and remarked with a whimsical smile: "So possibly you have saved Europe from a war."

CHAPTER XIII

MADAM JOLATSKY'S NECKLACE

MARY spent a pleasant hour with Princess Ida at her party. She was surprised at the informality of her reception, and amazed to find the people who addressed each other as lords and ladies were very simple, likable folks.

In that hour Mary received a very liberal education, but she was glad when it was all over and she was at liberty to spend her time roaming about London. She cabled to Willis that her mission had been successful and she was returning on the next boat, sailing in two days.

Those two days were crowded with sightseeing, every minute spent on top of buses, in quaint inns and historic buildings. St. Paul's thrilled Mary. She was awed by the British Museum. The Tower took her back to books she had read with Cap'n Jogifer; books in which crown jewels and medieval knights and ladies figured.

She pictured herself as an aristocrat, and spent much time thinking of her own origin,

wondering who and what she was. Her family had money; she was certain of that, for Billy Peart had been paid handsomely by some interested person to keep her in seclusion. Dreaming of the life she was born to lead fascinated her for many hours.

On the train which carried her to the steamship dock on the day of her departure Mary figured up her finances, finding that she would have almost $2,000 of her own after receiving the final payment for carrying the message to the Princess. She decided to spend that money in an effort to ferret out the mystery of who she was and who her people were.

Mary boarded the boat and found her stateroom. The ship was so crowded she had been unable to secure a room to herself. She shared her quarters with a pretty, black-eyed girl of theatric appearance. The girl's face seemed vaguely familiar, and she thought she caught a light of recognition in the other's eyes as they met while the boat was getting under way. But Mary could not place her. They introduced themselves, and Mary learned that her room-mate's name was Nell Benson. The name meant nothing to her. She was sure she had never heard it before.

Having put her luggage in order, Mary went up on deck to take a deep breath of sea air. She forgot her regret at leaving the Old World

in looking forward with new purpose to solving her own mystery. Already she was eager to be back in New York.

As she slowly paced the deck, she became conscious of the fact that two people were staring at her. As she looked in their direction she was startled by recognizing Lieutenant Strakey and the false princess, who was really Madam Jolatsky.

The meeting was disconcerting to all three, but Mary smiled pleasantly in greeting as she realized that their presence on the boat could mean no danger to her now that her work was done. Strakey did not impress her as a bad sort, but instinctively she disliked the woman; more for her bold eyes and hard face than for the trick she had played to obtain the letter. Madam Jolatsky's eyes blazed with swift anger as she recognized Mary. She nodded curtly to her and tugged at Strakey's arm. Mary smiled to herself as they passed on. The melodramatic attitude of the foreign woman was amusing.

Already the trip promised to be exciting. Between Nell Benson, Lieutenant Strakey and Madam Jolatsky, something was certain to happen to Mary.

Feeling cold, Mary went to her stateroom for a wrap. Slipping her key into the lock she opened the door noiselessly and stepped in just

in time to see Nell Benson, her room-mate, hurriedly closing a suit case.

"Why, Miss Benson!" exclaimed Mary, recognizing the case. "That's mine!"

"Oh!" The other's face crimsoned. "I must have opened it by mistake."

Mary stood staring at her curiously. "I wonder where I have seen you before?" she asked abruptly, deciding to find out at once the mystery surrounding her companion.

"Maybe it was at Billy Peart's, on Moseses Island," said Miss Benson, with a malicious smile, studying Mary's face to see how she would take the remark.

Mary flushed. She was certain she had never seen this girl during her life on Moseses Island. She wondered whether the girl was an enemy or a friend. Something told her that Miss Benson was acquainted with facts in her life of which she herself was ignorant.

"You never thought Billy Peart was your real father, did you?" asked Miss Benson sharply, looking keenly into Mary's wondering eyes.

"Why, no," answered Mary.

"Well, *he isn't.*" The answer came with an emphatic ring.

Mary stepped forward and grasped her room-mate's arm. "Tell me," she cried, "what do you know? Who am I?"

"I am not quite sure," answered Nell Benson, looking straight into Mary's eyes. "Until I know more I can only say this: I believe,"—she spoke very deliberately—"I believe I know who you are."

"But who? Who?" Mary cried excitedly, shaking the girl's arm.

"I can't tell you any more now," replied Miss Benson, "and you mustn't ask me. Wait till we reach New York." She drew away and slipped out through the door.

Mary started to follow, then paused. She wanted to learn more, but there would be time enough on the trip. The mystery Miss Benson had presented was fascinating. She sat on the edge of her berth and closed her eyes musingly, repeating to herself, "Who am I?"

Meanwhile Nell Benson, certain that Mary would stay in the stateroom for some time, went straight to the wireless operator's cabin on the top deck and sent two messages to New York. The alert Lieutenant Strakey happened to be in the room at the same time and managed to read over Miss Benson's shoulder the following message:

Mary, the missing heiress, aboard. Meet ship at New York.
NELL BENSON.

The lieutenant, a younger son, with no fortune and a doubtful career, was decidedly in-

terested in that message. At first sight he had been attracted by Mary's adventurous, fearless spirit, and now that he found her to be an heiress he felt quite in love with her.

When Mary left the stateroom a little later she was surprised to find Lieutenant Strakey standing near the door leading to the deck.

"Ah," he exclaimed, his eager tone disclosing the fact that he had been waiting anxiously for her appearance. "The American secret agent. Now that our business is finished I hope we may be friends."

"Why, yes, certainly," answered Mary frankly, having lost any feeling of fear for the man since delivering the message.

"Would you like to promenade?" he asked.

For answer Mary stepped to his side and walked with him slowly up and down past the long row of empty steamer chairs.

"This little sea is keeping the passengers below," remarked Strakey pleasantly. "I am amazed at your endurance. You seem as strong and energetic as a man. Do you know," he lowered his voice, "you are the very first woman who has outguessed me in secret service work. I hope we are going to be very good friends—since we have been such good enemies." His voice had a caressing, possessive note in it which made Mary uneasy. She slackened her pace.

"Am I going too fast?" he inquired solicitously.

"Well, rather fast." Mary smiled enigmatically, and Strakey pondered her words until he found the full force of the double meaning.

As they passed the open door leading from the main saloon, Mary saw Nell Benson looking out. Miss Benson beckoned to her. Nodding to Strakey, Mary left his side and hurried to her room-mate, hoping for some communication which would help solve the mystery with which she knew Miss Benson was acquainted.

"You will pardon the advice," said Nell Benson hurriedly, "but I would like to warn you against that man. He is a cheap adventurer."

Mary disliked her tone. "You mean Lieutenant Strakey?" she asked.

"Yes, if that is his name."

"But I believe I can take care of myself," answered Mary with pointed politeness.

"Maybe you can, but I am sure if you knew what I know you would act quite differently."

"About him?" asked Mary.

"No, about yourself."

The reply irritated Mary; for all she knew, Miss Benson's supposed knowledge of her secret might be pure pretense. In any event, she disliked being dictated to. With a curt little nod she rejoined Strakey.

"That girl is your room-mate?" he asked as they walked on.

"Yes," answered Mary. "Do you know anything about her?"

"Oh, no," replied Strakey with suspicious promptness. He changed abruptly to a description of his family castle at Melarmo, telling glowingly of its turreted towers, standing majestically above a black, craggy seacoast, its terraced gardens, and sumptuous fittings. His description was so personal that it had the effect of an invitation.

"Perhaps . . . some day . . . it might be possible . . ." he ventured.

"I hardly think so," Mary cut him off with crushing promptness. "Castles are not in my line. I have work to do."

Strakey was puzzling over Miss Benson's wireless message and trying to make up his mind about Mary. Finally he decided that she must be a rich girl who had run away from her family through some freakish desire for independence.

On the following day he lay in wait for her and insisted upon promenading again.

Mary grew tired of his company and sought to dodge him on the following days, but he was persistently at her elbow. She noted that Madam Jolatsky was displeased by his attentions and found impish delight in bothering the

foreign woman. When only two days of the voyage remained, Madam Jolatsky stopped Mary as she was passing through the companionway.

"One moment," she said icily. "You are going rather too far with Lieutenant Strakey. I insist that you understand."

Mary looked at her indignantly and started to pass, but Madam Jolatsky barred her way. "We are engaged. Do you understand?"

"I congratulate you," smiled Mary, passing on. She was glad of that insight into Strakey's character, and accepted his invitation to play at shuffleboard that afternoon because she knew Madam Jolatsky would be annoyed.

Nell Benson also took Mary to task again for spending so much time with Strakey, but Mary only laughed. She found it entertaining to be the subject of so much interested advice. So far she had met only one man whom she respected, and he would be waiting on the dock in New York to relieve her of any unpleasant attention Strakey might attempt to thrust upon her. That thought gave her confidence, and meanwhile she enjoyed herself as best she might in an effort to keep from continually thinking of the mystery Miss Benson had suggested.

On the day before the boat arrived in New York Mary lashed Madam Jolatsky's jealous

anger into flame by beating her at a game of shuffleboard with Strakey.

"Really you shouldn't have done that," Strakey admonished her as Madam Jolatsky left in anger and descended to her stateroom, "she is not exactly safe."

Next day, with New York in sight, Mary stood beside Strakey at the rail, looking hazily toward land, anxious to catch the first glimpse of Willis, who she knew would be waiting on the dock for her.

Suddenly Madam Jolatsky approached, her eyes aflame. She held out her right hand to Mary, exclaiming: "Please give me my necklace!"

"What?" gasped Mary.

"My necklace—that you stole while we were playing shuffleboard yesterday. It slipped from my neck. I saw you pick it up and put it in your pocket. I thought you did it only in fun and I have been waiting for you to return it, but we are coming in now and I must have it."

Strakey interposed. "Stop, Viola!" he cried. "This——"

"Do you dare to say——" began Mary, her face crimson.

"Dare?" Madam Jolatsky's voice rang out. "Why, I saw you pick it up, I tell you. I saw you put it in your pocket. Have you the face to deny that?"

"Why, you know better," flashed Mary. "I never saw your——"

Strakey grasped Madam Jolatsky's arm firmly and led her away, turning to say over his shoulder, to Mary, "Don't worry. It's a trick of some sort. She wants to make a scene."

Mary, in a flutter of excitement, went down to her stateroom and prepared her luggage for landing. The boat was already at its wharf when she returned to the deck, following a steward who carried her suit case and steamer rug. She peered over the side anxiously, hoping to see Willis, but could not find him in the sea of upturned faces.

Wondering what had become of Nell Benson, she turned to look for her as the gangplank was run out. Miss Benson had disappeared, and Mary was deeply disappointed in not learning the secret she had expected would be solved on her arrival.

Mechanically she followed the other passengers off the ship, looking anxiously for Willis and feeling deeply disappointed that he did not appear.

She stood on the deck beside her baggage while the customs officers made their examination; feeling confident that she would have no trouble with the inspection. She had bought nothing abroad, and was rather amused to see everybody so excited. Strakey and Madam

Jolatsky stood nearby as one of the officers unfastened Mary's trunk and dipped into it.

"What's this?" he asked a moment later, looking up at Mary as he drew out a necklace of pearls. The disarranged folds of a dress in the top tray showed where he had found it.

Mary opened her mouth to speak, but stood dumb as she looked at the necklace.

"Did you declare this?" asked the customs agent.

"No," said Mary. "I didn't declare anything. I never saw that before."

"Well, how'd it get there then?" queried the agent.

Mary looked around for help. The situation was bewildering. Miss Benson had seen her pack the top tray of her steamer trunk, Mary remembered, wishing she could find her roommate and get her to give evidence. But Miss Benson had mysteriously disappeared.

Suddenly Madam Jolatsky rushed up with extended hands. "It's mine!" she cried. "Give it to me." She leveled a shaking finger at Mary. "That girl stole it from me on the boat. I accused her of it this morning, but she denied it."

At a signal from the examining officer two men in uniform slipped quietly to his side.

Mary flushed deeply. "You don't think I stole it, do you?" she asked the trio of grim in-

spectors. "I don't know how it got into my trunk."

The inspectors appeared disinterested, as though used to excuses. One of them turned to Madam Jolatsky. "Can you prove your ownership?" he asked.

"Inspector, there is a big mistake here!" Strakey pushed forward and broke in sharply, standing protectingly at Mary's side.

"Well, we'll go at the thing slowly." The inspector turned to Madam Jolatsky, asking, "Can you prove your ownership?"

"I certainly can. I mentioned it in my declaration," she answered snappily.

The paper was produced. Madam Jolatsky was right. She had listed the necklace.

"But even then——" began Strakey.

Madam Jolatsky glanced at him contemptuously, then turned again to the inspector, "Oh, I can prove it's mine all right. Look for my name—Viola Jolatsky—engraved on the inside of the clasp."

The inspector looked. The name was there.

"Give me the address of some friend I can call on to help you," whispered Strakey to Mary. "Madam Jolatsky has played a trick on you. Whom shall I get?"

Mary hesitated. She was too proud to send for Willis, since evidently he had not troubled to call for her at the ship. She couldn't send

for Daisy Meade. Suddenly the thought of her old employer came to her mind. She had rendered him service in catching Dundon; doubtless he would be glad to help her.

"Phone to Mr. Rayner, of the firm of Rayner & Jones. Tell him to come."

Strakey hurried away, repeating the name.

Another inspector, evidently chief of those on the dock, spoke to Mary. "This is a very definite charge," he said. "The evidence is all against you. But don't you think you can get the lady to withdraw her charge? I am sure there is some way you can escape arrest." He seemed in sympathy with her and took it for granted that, however she had fallen into the scrape, she was worth helping out.

"I will not withdraw my charge," Madam Jolatsky spoke up hotly, having overheard the advice. "Not to make an example of her is to encourage others."

Creepy little shivers ran up and down Mary's spine. She realized now the full force of the foreign woman's fury and wished she had followed her warning to let Strakey alone. She was sorry, too, for a moment, that she had beaten Madam Jolatsky at shuffleboard before Strakey's eyes. But then she shrugged her pretty shoulders and laughed. Madam Jolatsky was too melodramatic for her. She had done nothing wrong.

The inspectors were surprised by her laugh. Mary faced them coolly. "I have sent for a friend," she said. "Can you wait? It is all a mistake. This woman doesn't like me. She probably put the necklace in my trunk herself."

Madam Jolatsky dropped her bold eyes before Mary's calm, critical gaze.

The inspectors waited. But Strakey did not appear with Mr. Rayner. Suddenly the chief inspector grew impatient. "I think we had better send her along to the station house, pending an inquiry," he whispered to one of his aides, who nodded his head and stepped toward Mary, asking her to follow him.

At that moment Nell Benson came hurrying through the crowd. Beside her was a tall, dignified man with a strong face topped by a silk hat, beneath which smooth silvery hair showed.

With one glance at Mary as Nell Benson pointed her out, the fashionably dressed man stepped to the chief inspector and presented his card. As the inspector read the card his manner became instantly deferential. He drew the aristocratic looking newcomer to one side and they whispered together for a minute.

Meanwhile Nell Benson stepped up to Mary and remarked with a glowing smile, "The reward is ours. We won it. Two thousand dollars for finding you and putting you in Mr.

Craig's hands." She nodded toward the gentleman who had come to Mary's rescue.

"But I don't understand. What is the secret you are talking about? How did you get the two thousand dollars you speak of?" asked Mary.

"Why, Mr. Craig heard of your escape from Moseses Island—I think he is a relative of yours—he advertised for you in the papers. Daisy Meade put me up to the job; she said from the description in the advertisements she thought it was you, and she managed to get Mr. Willis to tell her you'd gone to London. I borrowed the money and shipped on the next boat. The way I found you in London was by reading your name 'Mary Dangerfield' on the register at the Rex. So I took a chance, learned out the boat you were returning on and came along as your room-mate, wiring ahead for Mr. Craig to meet us."

"Daisy Meade," said Mary blankly, trying to slowly digest Miss Benson's voluble story. "She was in with you?"

"Yes, sir! A thousand apiece," answered Nell Benson emphatically.

Then Mary placed Miss Benson at last, remembering that she had seen her once at a theatrical office when she had been looking for work with Daisy.

At that moment the elderly man of whom

Miss Benson had spoken as "Mr. Craig," came up to Mary and shook her hand formally. "How do you do, Mary?" he said. "I am glad we have met again after so many years."

"But who are you?" cried Mary. "I don't remember ever seeing you before."

"Possibly not. You were very young at the time. I am your guardian. Something more than a friend, you see. Will you kindly come with me?"

Mary looked up at him earnestly. "Will you tell me who I really am?" she asked, with trembling lips.

"Yes. Presently. Come with me," said the courtly stranger, assisting Mary into a waiting limousine, which whirled rapidly away at his order.

CHAPTER XIV

SURPRISING REVELATIONS

Mary had never known such an exciting hour in her whole life. In that short space of time she had arrived in New York after a risky mission abroad, had been accused of theft, had been disappointed when Willis did not meet her on the dock, and then had been rescued from all troubles and anxieties by a cool, machine-like man, who inspired confidence and promised to tell her all about herself. She felt that she had made more progress in that single hour toward solving the mystery that haunted her than she had in all the time since she had left Moseses Island.

Sitting back in the motor with half-closed eyes, she reviewed the scene at the dock, thinking of Daisy Meade's part in her being discovered as an heiress of some sort, and trying hard not to ask questions.

At last a question repeated itself persistently in her mind. "Who is the man I am riding with? What made him willing to pay two thousand dollars to find me? Who is he?"

She opened her eyes with a start, as though waking from a dream, and anxiously studied the calm profile of the man at her side. She trembled with anticipation on realizing that the man's profile was something like hers. But his face had a chalky look, and he had never quite met her eyes. There was something fishy in his manner she had not noticed at first that began to make her a little uneasy.

"Who are you?" she demanded suddenly.

"My name is Richard Craig," he answered measuredly.

"Are you any relation to me?" Mary asked eagerly, her eyes round with wonder.

"At present I am your guardian," he answered evasively.

Mary felt from his uneasy answer that he must be some relation, but she wondered why he would not admit it. She was certain he was not her father, so it mattered little how close or distant kin he was.

"When am I going to find out who I really am?" urged Mary.

"Very shortly," was the prompt answer. "I will show you a picture of your mother, presently. You are very like her," he glanced sidewise at Mary. "Your mother died when she was little more than your age."

A rush of blood came to Mary's face. The abrupt thrust at a sentiment she had cherished

and shielded from childhood hurt. Stinging tears coursed to her eyes. She bit her lips to keep them back.

Her mother! Dead! Though she had always felt that, for a moment Mary suffered a keen pang of loss.

The car came to a stop. Mary, blinking moist eyes and trying to smile, took Richard Craig's hand as he helped her alight. She drew a deep breath and steadied herself as she accompanied him up the steps of a marble mansion as splendid as the Princess Ida's in London. It seemed incredible that she was to be admitted to this home on the footing of a friend, perhaps a relation.

She stepped past the butler and passed down the hall at Mr. Craig's side. He paused a moment to press a bell, and an elderly housekeeper came in answer.

"Perhaps Miss Mary would like to rest," he suggested to the housekeeper. Mary had noted before that he avoided using her last name. She felt certain, however, that her given name must be Mary.

"I am not tired," she protested as the amiable old housekeeper started to lead her away. "Won't you please tell me something about myself? I am burning to know," she turned pleading eyes on Craig, and added softly, "You said you would show me my mother's picture."

" Oh, yes, to be sure, to be sure," answered Craig in a hurried, businesslike tone. " So I did, so I did."

He led the way into a large drawing-room, quietly but richly furnished. On the farther wall hung a picture covered by a velvet curtain. He went up to the picture and stood, his hand ready to draw the curtain, while Mary waited with beating heart.

The curtain slowly slid aside, disclosing the vivid, colorful portrait of a girl-mother dressed in the quaint costume of a generation back. The face showed breeding, the eyes were large and sweet, the nose delicately modeled, the mouth sensitive. The soul of a gentlewoman spoke through the picture.

Mary drank in every detail. " Oh-h-h," she quavered in emotional happiness at last, sinking to her knees and stretching pleading arms up to her mother, " My hair is just the color of yours. Just the color." Tears gushed to her eyes. *"Mother, mother,"* she whispered prayerfully.

Richard Craig turned away, stepped into another room and waited impatiently until Mary had knelt for ten minutes before the mother shrine. Then he returned and tapped her on the shoulder.

" Come," he said. " You are going to live here. You will see the picture every day."

"Every day," beamed Mary, a bright, happy light in her tear-stained eyes.

"Yes," answered Craig. "I will have Mrs. Smith show you to your room now."

"I am to live here?" Mary's lips parted in amazed wonderment as she gazed about the room. "Why, this seems just like one of the old fairy tales I used to read back on Moseses Island."

"Does it?" replied Craig coldly, wincing slightly at mention of Moseses Island, as though it were connected with some unpleasant experience in his life.

Mrs. Smith, the housekeeper, appeared and took Mary to the room she was to occupy in her new home. The enchanted girl flitted from one beautiful object to another, marveling at the fleecy bed that was to be hers, opening all the drawers in the massive mahogany dresser and unpacking her trunk and suit cases when they arrived.

Finding a telephone in the room, she looked up Willis's number and repeated it in the transmitter. It was with some relief that she learned from the servant who answered, that Willis was out of town on business. That explained his failure to meet her at the dock in the afternoon. She gave her own telephone number and asked to have Willis call her on his return.

Tired out from the day's excitement Mary went to bed early, and did not awaken until late next day. Her bed was very comfortable and she stretched out luxuriously, gazing around her new room happily, basking in the morning sun.

The door opened a trifle and the white cap of a maid appeared in the aperture. "Ah, Madam is awake," she exclaimed. "Will you have your breakfast in bed?"

"Why, yes, thank you," answered Mary languidly, looking forward to the novelty of breakfasting in bed for the first time in her life.

A little later the trim maid appeared with a neat tray covered with a heavy linen cloth, on which were arranged a cup of chocolate covered with thick whipped cream, a dish of piping hot rolls, a cup of boiled eggs and a little jar of marmalade.

Resting on one elbow, Mary drew the tray to her and ate. She had never enjoyed a meal in such luxurious comfort before.

Lying there, she dreamily reviewed her whole history since leaving home. It seemed incredible, after being an actress, a stenographer, and a secret service woman, that now she had arrived by an unaccountable circumstance in the home of a wealthy man where she was made welcome as a visitor.

She felt that Craig must know everything

about her. Certainly he would not have opened his home to a stranger. She groped for an explanation, and finally decided to penetrate Craig's shell of quiet conservatism and ask him point-blank to tell her everything. Waiting was too tedious. She wanted to know a great deal at once.

The soft tinkle of a bell drew Mary's attention to the telephone. She jumped out of bed, hoping that Willis was calling her.

But on taking down the receiver she recognized the slow, deliberate voice of Mr. Craig.

"Good-morning," he said. "I just learned that you are awake. Did you rest well?"

"Fine, thanks," answered Mary breezily.

"I am leaving for the office. I just wanted to tell you to make yourself at home in my absence. Mrs. Smith will introduce you to my son, Henry. He will be pleased to attend to anything you wish done."

"Thank you," answered Mary. "I can't think of a single thing just now."

"I will see you at luncheon," answered Craig. "Good-by."

He hung up before Mary had a chance to ask him even one of the questions that were puzzling her. She put down the receiver with the thought that, whatever Craig was to her, he was very considerate and seemed anxious to be of service. She appreciated his thoughtfulness

and almost overlooked his cold, haughty bearing in consideration of it.

Having finished breakfast, she dressed slowly, thankful for the wardrobe she had purchased before going to London.

She had hardly put on a simple gown suitable for morning, when the telephone rang again and she rushed to answer. This time it was Willis.

"Hello, Miss Dangerfield," he cried eagerly. "I'm so glad you are back. I meant to meet the boat as much as anything yesterday. But I was 'way out in Colorado when your cable was forwarded to me, and the train got me in over twelve hours late."

"I really missed seeing you at the boat," answered Mary, frankly pleased with the explanation. "But I'm sorry you went to so much trouble to meet me."

"I've just heard some news of the startling things that have happened to you," he continued. "Can't I come right up and see you?"

"Yes, please do. I must talk to you about it," answered Mary anxiously. "Please come right away, the address is 143 Riverside Drive."

"Yes, yes, I know that. Craig's house. I know every inch of it. The room you're in we used to call the Palisades, because it's on the third floor, above the trees, and looks right out over the river to the Jersey cliffs."

"Yes," breathed Mary, glancing across the Hudson to the majestic Palisades on the opposite shore. "You know the Craigs then?"

"Better than they know themselves," laughed Willis. "I went through Yale with Henry; but I never imagined you were his cousin."

"His cousin!" breathed Mary. "Then Mr. Craig is my uncle?"

"I guess there's no question about that. But it's taken a long time for them to find you," answered Willis.

"Come, right away, quick! Please!" urged Mary. "You can tell me everything I want to know."

She hung up the receiver with trembling hand. It seemed a remarkable coincidence that Willis should know all about Mr. Craig, her new guardian, and his son. She paced the floor, impatient for his call. Purposely she stayed in her room to avoid meeting Henry Craig before Willis's arrival.

In less than half an hour the maid appeared to announce that Mr. Willis was waiting downstairs.

Mary tripped down the steps after the maid and was ushered into a comfortable living-room where Willis sat alone. He jumped up to greet her and they were soon seated together in a sunny nook by the window.

"Now tell me everything," breathed Mary. "Who am I?"

"Well," glowed Willis, "I've been to some pains to inform myself. You are the daughter of Arthur Craig, a banker, like all the rest of the family. As you probably know already, your father died before you were born and your mother died at your birth. You were taken to your grandfather's home and cared for by him until you were four months old. Then you were mysteriously kidnapped. I've heard the story hundreds of times in my family. The papers were full of it at the time."

"Why!" gasped Mary, amazed by the explanations she had sought so long. "Have you known this all the time?"

"Yes," smiled Willis, "but I didn't imagine you were the missing girl. How should I guess that?"

"But why didn't Mr. Craig tell me he was my uncle? Why didn't he tell me all this? He must have known it."

"He hasn't told you anything?" asked Willis, with a worried frown.

"No. He—he showed me my mother's picture, but that was all," said Mary, with a catch in her voice.

"He should have told you," answered Willis, his eyes growing serious. A moment later he

jumped up, exclaiming, "It's too warm in here, suppose we take a walk."

Mary readily assented, feeling that he had something to say which he was afraid would be overheard in the house.

When they were sauntering along the Drive, Willis remarked thoughtfully, "I don't exactly like the looks of things. I have learned just recently that in some way or other your uncle had located you on Moseses Island and that he had employed detectives to trace you when you ran away. Daisy Meade came to me about it just before you went to London.

"She had seen an advertisement mentioning Moseses Island and offering two thousand dollars' reward for the discovery of a missing heiress who had escaped from there. Remembering hearing you repeat the outlandish name of that island, she thought it was you; but I laughed at the idea. I looked up the advertisement, however, and found that Craig was back of it. That was the first thing that set me thinking."

"But why should my uncle be so interested in finding me, and then not admit the relationship?" asked Mary.

"That's what puzzles me," said Willis. He glanced around to make sure they were not being followed, and then said slowly, "Miss Dangerfield, or Miss Craig, as I should call you now, you might as well be on your guard at the

beginning. Your uncle has hardly lived up to the reputation of his family name. I happen to be a director in his bank, and lately we have been greatly bothered by his sharp practices. I don't like to burden your mind with all this, but you might as well know it now before you become fond of him. I think he is in a corner and desperately in need of something to pull him out."

"But why should he waste time on me?" asked Mary blankly.

Willis lowered his voice. "I've a notion that he counts on you to pull him out," he said thoughtfully.

"And how can I do that? I haven't any money."

"I'm afraid you have altogether too much money coming to you to make your position in your uncle's home entirely safe," answered Willis, with an anxious frown. "I believe you would be better off somewhere else. Craig was perfectly satisfied as long as you remained on Moseses Island, but now that you've taken things into your own hands and gone out looking for trouble, he is worried and wants to keep you under his eye. I suppose he would have been much happier if you had remained in ignorance on Moseses Island, settled down, married some fisherman and not troubled to investigate things for yourself."

Mary began to get an inkling of the real situation. "Then I have money left to me by my father and my uncle wants to get it?" she asked. "That is the situation?"

"Well, not exactly; it was your grandfather who left the money. Everything he had went to you, as I understand it. It is probably a good many millions by now."

"Millions!" gasped Mary.

"Yes, and that is the reason for your Uncle Richard's uneasiness. I haven't had time to look up the will yet, but I believe if you don't put in an appearance and make a claim for your grandfather's estate before you are twenty-one the money goes to Henry, Richard Craig's son."

"Why, I'm almost twenty-one already," gasped Mary.

"And that is why your uncle won't tell you of his relationship. He wants to keep you incommunicado, ship you off on a trip around the world, or something like that, I suppose, until you are safely past twenty-one and the money is in his son's hand. I begin to see things clearly now. Craig is in a bad scrape at the bank. I know that as a director. We've been trying to get proof against him, but he's a slippery eel. I think he is looking to your money to get him out of it. Now do you see?"

"Yes," breathed Mary, dazed to find that

just as everything seemed to be smoothing itself out before her her troubles were only beginning.

A slight young fellow in a morning suit came rapidly down the walk, swinging a modish Piccadilly stick.

"There's Henry Craig now," exclaimed Willis, looking up. "He probably saw us leave and has come out to keep us from talking together."

As young Craig approached, Willis stopped and smiled formally. "Well, Henry, I am glad we have run onto each other. I want you to know your cousin, Mary Craig."

Young Craig's face went red, he glanced shrewdly at Willis and then bowed to Mary. "Father told me about your coming," he said. "I didn't know that Mr. Willis was your friend."

"Oh, yes," smiled Mary, "we are old friends." She moved nearer to Willis, feeling a sense of protection at his side.

"It's odd for cousins to meet for the first time after so many years," continued Willis in an easy, conversational tone. "I suppose your father was keeping it as a surprise that Miss Craig is your cousin. He hadn't told you yet?"

Henry Craig dropped his gaze and fidgeted with his stick for a moment; finally he answered

nervously, "Why, no, Dad hinted at it, but my cousin Mary has always seemed a myth to me. I am glad to see her in the flesh and blood," he smiled to Mary.

She did not like his smile and looked up at Willis, trying to read his face. She saw that something disagreeable must have passed between the men and wondered why it was that Craig seemed ill at ease in the frank, honest presence of Willis.

"Are you returning to the house?" asked Henry Craig after an awkward pause. "Dad was looking forward to seeing Miss Craig at luncheon."

"Why, yes, we might as well go back," answered Willis.

Mary walked between the men, happy that Willis was returning to the great house, which had assumed a forbidding aspect since his surprising revelations.

CHAPTER XV

DETECTIVE WORK

THE luncheon at Craig's was very formal. Mary's uncle and cousin were silent in the presence of John Willis. They refused to discuss family matters and spoke guardedly. Willis and Mary were disappointed in learning nothing new.

After the meal, while the men sat smoking and drinking their liqueur, Mary slipped away to the room where her mother's picture hung. She pulled back the curtain and gazed long and earnestly at her mother's broad white brow, the tender, trembling curve of her lips, the wistfully sad look which her unseeing eyes still held. Mary knelt before the picture, fascinated.

"Mother," she whispered, clasping her hands and gazing up with starry eyes.

For a long time she remained on her knees, her thoughts seeking in the past, until she was suddenly aroused by a soft step at her side, and looked up into the sober, thoughtful eyes of Willis.

"Your mother," he breathed. "I have heard of her often." He stood looking rever-

ently at the picture. Mary felt the sympathy of his presence and, slowly wiping her moist eyes, drew the curtain tenderly over the portrait.

Willis walked with her to an adjoining room, where they sat down together on a spacious davenport.

"The Craigs have gone to the bank," he said. "I am going down later to have a talk with them about you and your grandfather's will. I could not get them around to it after lunch. They put me off with an excuse."

"I can't see why they should act so suspiciously," exclaimed Mary. "Both of them seem reluctant to admit any relationship to me."

"They are shrewd bankers in a bad fix, that is all," answered Willis. "I have a notion, too, that since they have found I am interested in your case they are changing their plans. Perhaps they are figuring on having Henry marry you to get your fortune, if nothing else will do."

"Marry Henry. That insignificant shrimp!" Mary cried hotly.

Willis laughed. "You are not very complimentary."

"How can they think of such a thing? Besides, we are first cousins."

"I guess they would not have any scruples about that," smiled Willis. "But as I said,

maybe that is the reason they are not admitting their relationship. I think the best plan, the one that probably will bring results, is for you to stay right here and see what you can find out. I don't think you will be in danger yet awhile, because it will be several weeks before you are twenty-one. They will probably try the marriage plan first, and that failing, may use force. Meanwhile, a little quiet looking around on your part might lead to something."

Mary spoke in a low, tense tone. "Detective work? I'd like to do that."

"Then keep your eyes open for everything, and maybe I can find something you can do that will help us put Craig in jail."

"Oh, I would not want him to go there," cried Mary, flushing. "Even if he is trying to hold back my money, I don't think he is really bad at heart."

"He hasn't any heart," answered Willis. "He has a little steel machine that runs by clockwork in place of one." He rose as though to go.

"But, Mr. Willis," cried Mary, rising apprehensively, "I don't like staying here after all I know. The house seems creepy. Can't I walk to the bank with you?"

"Well," Willis hesitated, his manner showing plainly that he longed to be with her, "I don't think it would be wise. The Craigs are

already too suspicious of me. They know I am interested in what's going on at the bank. But don't worry about staying here alone. I guess you are able to take care of yourself after your experience in London. I will manage to phone you or see you every day. You see, the Craigs can't object to anything I do, because they are afraid I know something about the bank business that they don't want to become public property. You'd better stay right here."

"I won't feel nervous if I know you are near at hand, where I can call you in time of need," answered Mary.

"You can rely on me for that;" he pressed her hand in parting.

Mary spent the afternoon in the library, forgetting time and everything in dipping into interesting volumes.

When the Craigs returned she dressed for dinner and went down to the spacious living room where father and son sat before a crackling grate fire. The homey atmosphere was pleasant. Both rose smilingly to greet her, and they went in to dinner presently.

Mary followed Willis's advice in keeping her ears and eyes open, but nothing of interest occurred. Toward the close of the meal Father Craig brought out his watch abruptly and suggested, "Henry, why don't you take Mary to the theater to-night?"

"Would you like it?" asked Henry, raising his scant eyebrows to Mary.

"Why, yes," she answered, knowing that Willis would not come that evening.

"I will call up and get tickets," said Henry, rising with alacrity and leaving the room.

Craig's eyes followed him fondly. "Fine boy," he said ardently, looking directly at Mary as though wishing to impress his opinion on her mind. She nodded in reply and blushed, remembering Willis's suggestion that the Craigs were probably arranging to keep her in the family.

When Henry returned he announced, "I got seats to 'The Daisy Maid.' You will like it, it's a jolly musical comedy, new to Broadway, but a good one. I suppose you haven't had much time for the theater since leaving Moseses Island; and there isn't even a moving picture show on the Island, is there?"

"No," answered Mary, restraining a smile with difficulty, as she realized that the Craigs evidently had no knowledge of how she had spent her first few weeks in New York.

Henry rang for the car shortly and they set out for the theater, Mary looking forward to a genuine thrill in seeing "The Daisy Maid" from the front of the house for the first time. She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that she almost forgot Henry and heard few of his words

as he rattled on about New York life, in an effort to be engaging.

At the theater they had seats well down front and Mary looked wide-eyed at the great blank curtain stretched before them. She could hardly wait for it to rise, and when it did she flushed with pleasure and her lips moved in repeating the familiar lines of the opening scene. She recognized every face on the stage, knew each word before it was uttered and enjoyed the whole thing so intensely that when the curtain went down on the first scene she turned to Henry and gasped, "Isn't it splendid?"

"I am so glad you like it," answered Henry with enthusiasm, appreciating her enjoyment and thinking to himself that it must be quite a treat for a girl reared so simply to see a real musical comedy for the first time.

In the second scene Mary was a little disappointed when Daisy Meade came on and ran away from the leading man in the same conscious, sophisticated manner that had proved irritating months before. Mary had an impulse to leap onto the stage and go through the part she had created, with the abandon of youth which Daisy's interpretation lacked.

When the play was over Mary was reluctant to leave her seat. She would have enjoyed seeing it all again, and next to that she would have

liked going back to the dressing rooms to congratulate the players. But Henry was already holding her cloak for her, and she rose with a wistful sigh to accompany him.

"I never saw anybody enjoy a play as much as you did," remarked Henry, when they were again seated in the limousine and bound for home.

"It is all so new to me," answered Mary. "It is the first time I have seen a play from the front, I believe."

Henry was puzzled by her words for a moment, but finally put down the form of expression to ignorance rather than experience.

Mary slept soundly that night and was awakened in the morning by a telephone call from Willis. He asked her to meet him on Riverside Drive in an hour. Mary caught an anxious note in his voice, dressed hurriedly, breakfasted, and slipped out of the house without meeting either of the Craigs.

Willis was already waiting for her as she walked out onto the drive.

"The plot thickens," he smiled. "I did not get a chance to talk to your uncle about the will yesterday afternoon, because something happened at the bank while I was there. Craig told me upon my arrival that he had caught his secretary raising a check. I investigated it and my idea is that Craig raised the check himself

in order to throw suspicion elsewhere when it's discovered that somebody has been embezzling funds from the bank."

"Was it a large amount of money?" asked Mary, with interest.

"No, that's what makes me think I am right. Craig charged the poor fellow with raising a hundred dollar check to two hundred. It does not seem possible that he would do such a risky thing for so small an amount of money. I wanted to get hold of you the first thing this morning to see if you could help me on a little detective work. You said you would like to try your hand at it."

"Yes," answered Mary eagerly.

"Well, then, the idea is this: You can go to the bank to call on your uncle this morning. He'll be flattered by your interest. You will have the run of the place, and he won't suspect your presence, as he would mine, or that of a regular detective."

"But what am I to do?" asked Mary eagerly.

"Well, I have learned that he has an appointment with Henry at eleven. You go in at about that time, find them busy and say that you will wait outside. I have arranged with the man in the outer office so you can slip into the storeroom where the stock of printed matter and stationery is kept. This fellow in

charge of the outer office is a Burns operative. We have had him there for three weeks watching the Craigs, but he can't do much because they seem to suspect him."

"And what am I to do in the storeroom?"

"You will find a telephone in there, and the Burns man has fixed the switchboard by fastening one button down with a match so the phone in the storeroom is connected with the phone on Craig's desk, which has also been fixed so that while the receiver is hanging up, the receiver hook is raised, propped up by a wire. So anything said in Craig's room will carry into the transmitter, and you can hear it through the receiver in the storeroom."

Mary's eyes snapped purposefully. "I see," she exclaimed. "I am to take the conversation down in shorthand, and if there is anything criminal in the talk between the Craigs it will be used against them in evidence if they come to trial for embezzlement."

"That's it exactly. Do you think you can handle it?"

"I had several weeks' training as an actress, you know," smiled Mary. "I think my training will come in handy when I call at the bank at eleven."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Willis. "I knew I could count on you for a thorough job. I have a notion that the bank will have to close

up to-morrow. I'll lose a good bit myself if it does, but I'd rather lose all I've got than have the Craigs go on defrauding poor investors.

"If you manage to get anything definite over the telephone in the storeroom this morning I will have a bank examiner on the job right away, and with the Craigs safely in prison we will be free to look up your grandfather's will without fear of interruption. I had better go now. We must not be seen together until after this is over."

He walked on and Mary sauntered back to the house, turning over in her mind plans for carrying out the morning's work.

At a little before eleven she appeared at the bank and entered the outer office where the Burns operative sat. He knew her instantly from the description Willis had left with him and they exchanged a significant glance of recognition. Mary asked for her uncle, and the Burns man stepped to the door of the private office to announce her.

Craig came to the door himself, rubbing his smooth palms together in delight, pleased that Mary had been interested enough to call on him, as Willis had prophesied he would be.

"Come in, come in," he called out in cordial welcome.

Mary smiled demurely; the trusting smile of an affectionate niece, she hoped. "I am afraid

you are busy, Uncle Richard," she said, glancing about the sumptuously outfitted office with assumed timidity.

"Never too busy to see you, my dear," he answered suavely, drawing up a heavy mahogany chair beside his desk.

"I thought I would come down and see your bank. It's a wonderful place, isn't it?" remarked Mary. "But I am so afraid I am interrupting your business."

"Not at all, not at all," Craig smiled amply, dropping into a chair before her and playing idly with a paper weight. "I am glad you take an interest in our affairs. Henry will be here presently. We have a little business to transact, but it will only take a few minutes, and then he will be glad to show you around. Have you ever seen a million dollars in one pile?"

"No," answered Mary, with an expectant laugh.

"Well, I will have him show you that. He will take you to the room where we have a man cutting up bank notes; we get them in big sheets from the government engravers, you know. I will have him show you some counterfeit money and everything."

"Oh, it sounds very interesting," said Mary.

At that moment the door opened and Henry stepped jauntily in, twirling his cane.

Mary rose abruptly. "I shall wait outside

while you men talk business," she remarked, starting for the door.

"All right, my dear, we won't be but a minute, and then Henry shall show you all through the bank." He turned to put his arm affectionately about his son's shoulders and say to him, "Mary is honoring us with a visit. I have told her that you will take her in charge."

"I'll be delighted to," answered Henry, with an effusive smile.

Richard Craig held the door open and Mary passed out, walking slowly toward the desk in the outer room where the detective sat. As she heard Craig close the door of the private office behind her, she hurried anxiously forward, questioning the man at the desk with her eyes.

He pointed to an open door at her left. His lips moved and he said in a voice so low it was scarcely audible: "That is the storeroom."

Mary hurried into the dimly lighted room and closed the door. She found the telephone on a stand directly before her. Picking up the receiver with one hand, she hurriedly drew a pencil and a slip of paper out of her hand-bag with the other. Then, pressing the receiver to her ear, she listened.

An inaudible murmur was all she could hear. Her eyes drifted about the storeroom idly, as she concentrated her attention in an effort to distinguish the words. She feared that the

Craigs were standing too far from the telephone on the desk in the private office for their voices to carry. But a moment later she caught several words distinctly and recognized Henry's voice.

"Well, what will you do? " he asked sharply.

Evidently they had moved nearer the desk, for Richard Craig's voice came plainly to her ear in answer.

"*Do!*" he cried. "Just as I told you."

Then there was silence. Meantime, Mary's wandering gaze had settled on a dusty commercial phonograph standing on top of a pile of blank checkbooks. She had both given and taken dictation by phonograph in Rayner's office, and thoroughly understood the instrument.

A thought flashed instantaneously through her mind. A tangible record of the conversation between the Craigs would be much more valuable as evidence than any shorthand notes she could make.

It was the work of a second to step to the phonograph and slip in place one of the fresh records from a box beside the machine. Her hands flew. Finding that the dictation machine was already wound up, she set the mechanism going and thrust the receiver into the dictating horn just as Henry Craig replied slowly.

She leaned tensely over the receiver and

heard faintly, " But, Dad, this thing has got to end sometime. We can't go on doctoring the books and committing forgeries. I can never win that girl's consent. She hates me."

Mary scowled as she realized that she was the subject of their cold-blooded conversation. Any delicate ethical doubts she had had about listening to their words and taking them down disappeared in that instant.

She listened further, meanwhile watching the wavy lines on the wax cylinder to make sure the evidence was being recorded.

" Well, then we've got to throw all the blame on somebody else. We've got to raise the figures on a check that passes through one of the tellers' hands. We'll make one of the tellers the scapegoat, the same as we did Johns, by raising his hundred check to two hundred."

" But, Dad, it's risky business working with acids. We'll get caught. It's bad enough to trim depositors without going too deep into forgery."

" We've got in so deep now there's no other way out," Craig's voice came clearly to Mary's taut ear. " We'll just have to keep on juggling the books until you can marry the girl, or until we can get her out of the way and bring you forward as heir to the old gentleman's millions, after her failure to appear before she is twenty-one."

"Oh, I suppose that's the best way. But I'm looking for trouble from her," answered Henry. "Willis smells a mouse, the same as the rest of the directors. He likes Mary, and to help her get the money that's coming to her he'll probably try first to show there's something wrong here. What if he should get a bank examiner on the books to-morrow? There wouldn't be time to cover up the half million you're short." The voice trembled with anxiety.

"Now, Henry. This is no time to imagine things about bank examiners. We'll work on the books to-night. I've got track of a clever forger to help us. We'll cover the thing up. I'll get him to raise a check on New York and makes Johns or one of the tellers the scapegoat, or else I'll have a mythical depositor put through a check and defraud us of half a million. That would about balance the books, if they can't be balanced any other way."

Mary was horrified by the disclosures. She had not dreamed that such an aristocratic, polite man as her uncle could be such a downright, deliberate criminal.

"Well, I'll do my best with Mary meantime," she heard Henry's voice in reply to his father. "We'll get busy on the books to-night."

"Yes, go out and take her through the bank; she's interested. I think it's a good sign that she came down here of her own accord. Make

violent love to her; she's simple,—if you make strong enough love to any woman you can——"

Mary hung up the receiver. The phonograph record was complete. She had no more time to listen to the disgusting revelations. Slipping out the neat little cylinder of wax, she held it up triumphantly, then wrapped it quickly in a filmy handkerchief and placed it carefully in her hand-bag.

She slipped to the door and opened it. Henry Craig was just leaving his father's private office.

"Oh, there you are!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mary coolly. "I couldn't wait for you, you see; I've been on an investigating tour of my own; but I must say you don't keep anything very interesting in that storeroom."

"No," laughed Henry, "I guess it would take a person with a whole lot of imagination to find anything of the least interest in there."

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRIAL

MARY had no sooner made a hurried, perfunctory trip through the bank than she excused herself and went out alone to hunt up a telephone booth. Finding one in a corner drug store, she called Willis's number and made an appointment to meet him at his office, where they could be assured of privacy.

It was not long before they were seated close together, listening to the incriminating record, which Willis had put on the dictation machine in his office.

Convinced that the long-looked-for proof was at hand, Willis sent word to a bank examiner who awaited his signal to make an investigation. A moment later he called up District Attorney Hovey and made an appointment with him at Craig's house in half an hour.

Knowing that the Craigs would both be at home for lunch and expecting Mary, Willis called up the elder Craig and told him that he was taking Mary home.

"Craig didn't ask me to lunch with you

people," said Willis, turning to Mary with a wan smile. "Poor old fellow! I'm afraid if I ever lunch with him again it will be in Sing Sing. It seems a shame to find out such things about a man one has known all one's life."

"But it's better to know the truth and do something about it than to let him keep right on fooling you and defrauding countless other people," said Mary snappily.

"Oh, yes," agreed Willis. "There are some very disagreeable things in life one can't shirk. Besides, I feel a deeper interest in your welfare than in the Craigs'."

Mary blushed. It was the first time he had adopted so personal a tone. Instead of being annoyed, as she would have been had any other man made the same remark, she was pleased.

They went to the Craig home on Riverside Drive in a taxi. As they drew up in front of the house three men alighted from an automobile just ahead. Willis jumped out before Mary and ran up to the man in the lead.

"Mr. Hovey," he said, glancing at the two husky, broad-shouldered plain clothes men who accompanied the District Attorney, "do you think it is necessary to have these men come in? The Craigs will make no resistance, I am sure of that."

"You never can be too sure. It's been my experience that when I go to talk things over

with an embezzler it's always well to have him securely under arrest first."

"Well, you know best," Willis shrugged his shoulders and turned to Mary, who hurried up the steps to his side.

The five people walked solemnly into the hall and were ushered into a side room by the surprised old butler.

"Mr. Richard Craig and Mr. Henry Craig," requested Willis. "Just say some gentlemen to see them." The fact that he found his duty disagreeable showed plainly in his face. He did not look up or speak to any of the others while the soft-footed servant hurried on his errand.

A little later the portières parted and Richard Craig stepped in, followed by Henry.

Recognizing the District Attorney, his face went white and he took a step backward.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Craig," said Hovey, rising courteously and advancing; the two detectives stepping quietly to his side. "There is an investigation at Headquarters. We will need both you and your son. I came to have a little talk with you to make certain that the People have a case."

"Am I under arrest?" Craig drew himself up haughtily and stared pointedly at the two hulking officers.

"That is not exactly in my department. Let

us waive the formalities," said Hovey politely.

"But what does this mean? You are at the bottom of this?" cried Craig, losing control of himself again as he advanced toward Willis threateningly.

"Yes, I'm sorry," answered Willis, "but I had to take a hand. I sent to Headquarters for a warrant when I found you and Henry had embezzled half a million from the bank, and my friend the District Attorney was kind enough to come with the officers to make certain that there is no misunderstanding in this case."

"Embezzler!" hissed Craig, controlling himself with evident effort. "That is an odd charge." He sneered.

Henry had backed behind his father and was glancing about furtively, his trembling fingers nervously picking at the portière.

"I am amazed that you should believe any such thing, Willis," said Craig in a low, vibrant tone. A look of affected pain came into his eyes. "But then, in this world one can never count on anyone as a true friend."

"We won't discuss that," answered Willis mildly. "It is just as painful for me, and I am as much at a loss to know my friends as you. The point is merely that, as you know, the directors of the Commercial National have doubted your intentions for some time. We have had a Burns man in the office, and the fact

is that a little after eleven o'clock this morning he overheard the conversation you and Henry had about marrying a certain young lady, raising a check, or adopting most any criminal means that would prevent the disclosure of the fact that you have embezzled half a million. We have the evidence, which contains several interesting admissions on your part."

"It is ridiculous," cried Craig, his face reddening. In his anger he turned on Mary. "And you were in this?" he cried.

"Yes," answered Mary, looking him straight in the eyes until he dropped his gaze guiltily.

"This young lady," sneered Craig, turning to the District Attorney, "was accused of stealing a necklace from Madam Jolatsky at a pier here in New York the other day. Feeling sorry for her, I went to her rescue, and this is the thanks I get."

"But that has nothing to do with Mr. Willis's charge," said the District Attorney mildly. "I am afraid if you take this belligerent attitude I can do nothing for you. I hoped I would have a chance to promise leniency in exchange for a confession."

"A confession! A confession of what?" cried Craig. "A confession of the treachery of friends? Yes, I'll give you that. But nothing else."

"Then I am afraid my errand here is useless.

You have the warrant, Shields. I'll be going." Hovey picked up his hat and went quickly through the door. Willis and Mary turned to speak to each other in low voices to keep from embarrassing the Craigs as the officers attended to the formalities of the law and led them off.

Craig asked permission to say something to his butler. A moment later the butler entered the room where Mary and Willis sat alone, and politely requested them to leave.

"With pleasure," answered Mary angrily, having lost all patience with the pseudo aristocracy of the Craig household.

She led the way out, and the door was shut behind them.

Willis paused on the steps. "Why, your things!" he exclaimed. "You are not going to leave them, surely?"

"Yes. I don't care what happens to them. I have money to buy more. I wouldn't put my foot inside that house again for all the money in the world," she flashed. "Let them keep the clothes in return for their hospitality. Oh," she exclaimed, on the verge of tears. "To think of looking forward to meeting one's people for a whole lifetime and then to find out that they are criminals."

Willis tried to calm her, but she flung angrily down the steps and turned into the Drive at a rapid stride.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Willis, having walked in silence at her side for several blocks.

"I think I'll look up a place to live," answered Mary. "How long do you suppose it will be before the Craigs come to trial?"

"We'll rush the thing through," said Willis. "It won't take long. I think you'd be more comfortable in a hotel than anywhere else, meantime." He suggested the name of a quiet family hotel, and that afternoon Mary engaged a room there.

The next day she bought new clothes to take the place of those left at the Craigs', and went to dinner with Willis. They decided to leave the matter of the will until after the Craigs' trial, and during the following days Mary was busy helping Willis get evidence.

At last the day of the trial came. Mary was on hand early. She sat at the witness table and looked around the courtroom with interest.

There was an air of quiet calm when she took her place, but as lawyers and witnesses gathered, the atmosphere changed to one of expectancy. Spectators tiptoed quietly about and court attendants had no trouble in maintaining order and quiet.

The hands of the great clock above the judge's bench moved slowly, particularly so to Mary, for she was expecting John Willis. He

had promised to be there by ten, and the minute hand was crowding the last second closely.

Just as it touched the figure twelve the door of Judge Russel's chamber opened silently and he walked to the bench, his black robes trailing behind him. The waiting throng respectfully rose. The court crier intoned his usual plea of "God Save the Commonwealth," and, "All having business with this term of the Supreme Court draw nigh and ye shall be heard." Just as they sat down Mary felt the welcome pressure of Willis's hand on her arm. He dropped into a seat beside her.

"Sorry to be late," he whispered, as District Attorney Hovey rose in his place inside the rail reserved for members of the bar.

"Your Honor, I move the trial of Richard Craig and Henry Craig, indicted under the state banking act for misappropriation of funds."

"You may proceed," came the austere voice of Judge Russel.

The District Attorney outlined what the People would prove and called several witnesses, among them a little washerwoman who had lost the savings of half a century through the crooked manipulations of the Craigs.

The woman left the stand, and Mary thrilled as the court clerk called:

"Mary Craig! Come forward and be sworn."

She stepped quickly to the witness stand. The crowded courtroom craned in surprise to look at her sweet face and admire her graceful, girlish figure. With a serious expression, Mary raised her right hand and took the oath to "Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"You are related to the defendants at the bar?" asked Mr. Hovey.

"I am the niece of Richard Craig and cousin to Henry Craig," Mary replied.

"On or about the day named in this indictment were you in the banking house of which the defendant Richard Craig was president?"

"I was."

"Whom did you see there?"

"Among other people, my uncle and my cousin."

"Anyone else? Was this gentleman there?" He pointed to the Burns operative who had been seated at the desk in the outer office.

"He was."

"Tell the jury what took place on the occasion of your first entrance to the bank."

Mary sketched briefly her conversation with Craig and told of going to the storeroom and hearing the conversation over the prepared telephone.

"Where were you when you overheard this conversation?"

"In the little room back of my uncle's private office."

"Tell the jury what you overheard on that occasion."

Mary told, with rising excitement, of the Craigs' talk about raising checks. Then she explained how she had inserted the telephone receiver in the horn of the phonograph, and of her preservation of the waxen record of their remarks, which she had afterward sent to the District Attorney by John Willis.

When she had finished, Mr. Hovey produced the record and Mary identified it as the one she had made.

Amid strenuous objections on the part of the defendants' lawyers, Judge Russel ruled the record competent evidence, "For the purpose of corroborating the witness, Mary Craig."

It was a tremendously dramatic moment when the hard voice of Richard Craig was reproduced by the phonograph and carried to the intently listening men in the jury box. When Henry Craig's voice took part in the conversation, and the hideously incriminating plot was repeated in all its damning detail, the set faces of the twelve men who were to decide the question of the guilt or innocence of the accused held their verdict so plainly written that all might read it. The prisoners, keenly alive to

the fate that awaited them, wilted in their chairs.

"The State rests," snapped District Attorney Hovey as Mary stepped from the stand, amid a subdued buzzing from the spectators, and imperative thumping and orders of court attendants endeavoring to maintain silence.

Ashy-faced, the two defendants huddled together, while their counsel made sundry objections, motions to expunge the records, and to dismiss the indictment on the ground that no criminal intent had been proven. They were promptly overruled and, after a hurried whispered conference, the defense announced that it would introduce no testimony.

"What's the use of perjuring yourself?" the prisoners' chief counsel advised the Craigs. "That girl and that phonograph record nailed you to the cross."

The judge charged the jury that "The State has established the intent for the crime and the crime itself. Your verdict, in the absence of explanation or denial, must be that of guilty as charged in the indictment."

The jury retired. Everybody in the courtroom knew that it was a mere formality. In ten minutes they were back again, and the words, "Guilty as charged in the indictment," sealed the fate of the two miserable bankers.

As reporters rushed excitedly to telephone

booths in the outside corridor Judge Russel gave immediate sentence, "Twelve years in State's prison at hard labor, for Richard and Henry Craig."

Mary, as she walked unsteadily out of the courtroom, was glad to lean on John Willis's arm. She kept back the tears with difficulty, knowing that she had done the right thing and yet regretting that she had had to help in the conviction of her uncle and cousin.

"Now," said Willis, as they walked toward Mary's hotel, "we are free to give our whole time to establishing you as heir under your grandfather's will and finding out if possible who kidnapped you, and for what purpose. Possibly that inquiry will end in another case against Richard Craig."

"Oh, I hope not," said Mary. "It's a horrid feeling to know that I have put those two men in jail. I'd like to forget it all; but I can't."

She shuddered as she caught sight of the following headline printed in red ink at the top of an extra which a newsboy was shouting in the streets:

Mary Craig, Star Witness for State. **Craig Trial Breaks All Records for Speedy Justice. Arranged, Tried, Convicted and Sentenced in Six Hours.**

CHAPTER XVII

IN TROUBLE

Prison walls make little difference in the natures of men. Bankers are bankers, in prison or out. Even behind the walls of their new home, Richard and Henry Craig remained as aloof from the common people as they had in the outside world.

For a few days father and son had to take their exercise under an armed guard, but both were soon transferred to clerical duties in different parts of the great institution. They occupied adjoining cells, however, on the gallery known in prison parlance as "Bankers' Row." The suave diplomacy of the older man, his aloof bearing, his infallible courtesy, his readiness for his tasks, all the results of a lifetime of experience in moulding men to his desires, stood him in good stead.

At night in his cell his restless, feverish brain planned schemes for vengeance. He decided that, although locked in a cell, he still stood an excellent chance of defrauding Mary of her inheritance. He focused all his energies on ways and means to that end.

On the second evening in his cell, when the guard was padding softly above, making the first "night count," Craig gave one rap on the partition between his cell and Henry's as a signal for his son to pull on a silk string they had arranged to convey notes along the corridor. The other prisoners on the gallery communicated in the same manner, with an easily learned telegraph code.

At the signal Henry jumped from his cot and pulled on the string, drawing through the slit under the door of his cell a tin plate bearing a slice of bread.

He picked up the bread and found the following note laid beneath it:

Mary twenty-one, January 17th. Two weeks to work. Can you think of a scheme to get her out of the way so the fortune goes to you? With that money an appeal is possible and release on bail is certain. Cheer up. DAD.

Henry turned the slip of paper over and wrote on the back of it with a piece of pencil lead he had managed to conceal:

Try Billy Peart on Moseses Island. Get him to come to New York. Get Mary's address from Willis or one of those actresses who turned Mary up in London. Have Billy Peart kidnap Mary. He'll do anything for a hundred or two.

As a result of this plan Richard Craig managed to bribe a prison guard with a twenty dollar bill to send a telegram to Billy Peart.

When Billy read it he nearly fainted. He

had thought that with Mary's departure from Moseses Island he had been cut off from a valuable source of revenue in the Craigs. A message from Craig in the past had always meant money. This unexpected communication would be no exception, he felt. Without loss of time he packed a little satchel and went off on one of those mysterious trips which always excited much comment on Moseses Island. Taking a train to New York, he changed to an express and reached the prison town from which Craig had sent the message. At a little after eleven o'clock he was in the warden's office asking to see Richard Craig.

A guard took him to the office where Craig was working under the watchful eye of prison authorities. It wrenched Billy's soul to part with a five dollar bill, but he gave that amount to the guard to insure privacy.

The prison attendant absented himself on the pretext of giving an order to another prisoner. When he returned, after the space of three minutes, he heard only the usual commonplace inquiries about Richard Craig's health from his visitor, and the convict's reply that he was receiving very good treatment. He touched Billy Peart's shoulder.

"Time's up!" he said.

Billy shook Craig's hand as it was extended through the bars.

"Good-by, Mr. Craig. Don't lose hope. Maybe everything'll turn out all right yet."

"Good-by," said the prisoner.

Billy Peart shuddered slightly as the serpentine line of the men in "Bankers' Row" slipped down the corridor in lockstep to their dinner. He drew a deep breath of relief when the outside prison gate clanged behind him. He had had to wait a moment for a signal from the office before the door was opened, and in that moment he was congealed with fear that they would never let him out of that great tomb of steel and stone.

He hurried to the station and was back in New York in the early afternoon. Taking out a card on which he had scrawled the addresses of Willis and Daisy Meade which Craig had given him, he sought a telephone and asked for Willis's number, intending to get Mary's address from him. But Willis was not in his office. So Peart called up Daisy Meade at her boarding house and soon had her on the wire.

He explained that he was a connection of Mary's and had come to New York to find her. Daisy was glad to give him the name of Mary's hotel, which she had learned from Willis.

Grinning with satisfaction, Billy Peart started out, and asked a policeman his direction to the hotel.

On reaching it he sent up his name to Mary's

room and received immediate word that Mary would be down. She met him in the lobby, extending her hand in greeting.

"Sakes alive, child!" he cried. "It does me a powerful lot of good to see you again." He shook her hand effusively.

The homeliness of the hearty greeting deceived Mary. While she did not like Billy Peart, his was the first familiar face from home she had seen in many months. Instantly memories of happy hours on Moseses Island came back to her—simple, untroubled hours, the calm existence of people untouched by the fierce miasma of greed, unscarred by the terrible flame of reckless ambition.

"How are Aunt Liza and Cap'n Jogifer?" cried Mary.

"Oh, they're fine." Billy Peart hesitated for a minute. He had hurriedly framed a little plan to carry out Craig's wishes, and had bribed a chauffeur to wait around the corner for him and keep his mouth shut about anything that might happen. All Billy Peart wanted was to get Mary safely into that taxicab. The rest of the situation he felt competent to handle, but adroitness was not in his line. Flushing awkwardly, he continued, "I come to the city on business for the store. This time I brought your Aunt Liza along."

"You did," cried Mary in amazement, ac-

cepting his strange manner as embarrassment over the fact that he had done a decent thing for once in his miserable life. "Where did you leave her?"

"Back to the hotel," answered Billy Peart promptly. "I left her there and come out alone to see if I could find you."

"Well, I'm so glad you did," answered Mary. "Was it hard to get track of me?"

"No, I had a letter from that actress you was livin' with, and she told me where you were." He smiled, as though in appreciation of his own shrewdness.

"But I must see Aunt Liza right away. Just wait till I get my hat." Mary turned to an elevator and rode up to her room.

Billy Peart sat anxiously awaiting her return. He had not hoped for such good fortune. He had expected some difficulty in getting Mary into the waiting taxicab, but now it would be easy.

A few minutes later Mary appeared, fresh as a flower. She went out to the street with him, asking eagerly for all the Moseses Island gossip.

Billy Peart told her everything he could think of as they sauntered along. Suddenly he stopped as the driver of the taxicab he had hired signaled him.

"Why, here," smiled Billy Peart, "what

was I thinkin' of? I was so happy to see you again I didn't stop to remember it's mor'n a mile to the hotel where Liza's stoppin'. Let's be real swell and take a taxicab. I don't get to New York often enough to spend much money."

Mary smiled at his remark, and stepped into the waiting taxi as the obliging driver jumped to the curb and opened the door for her. She thought the chauffeur a little too eager, but ascribed his alertness to a desire for a fare and suspected nothing. Billy Peart gave the name of a hotel at random and sat down beside her.

The car leaped forward, Peart jostled against Mary and smiled evilly as he jerked down the black window curtain at his side. "The sun's too strong," he said in explanation. With a triumphant leer he suddenly lurched forward and pulled down the shade at Mary's side.

"Why, what are you doing that for?" she cried, in instant alarm.

Dimly she made out his ugly face peering down into hers and felt his rough hand clasp her wrist in a determined grip. She struggled and tried to throw him to one side, but he held hard, panting. Finally she managed to free one hand and knock on the glass separating her from the driver. But he did not turn at the sound. Instead he threw on higher speed, and

Mary sank back onto the seat despairingly, realizing that she had been trapped.

"There!" grunted Billy Peart as he captured her free hand again. "Now sit still and shut up!"

"What does this mean? What are you going to do?" demanded Mary, her face blazing.

Billy Peart sneered at her, but made no reply.

By lurching against the window curtain with her shoulder, Mary managed to jerk it up part way. She turned her face to the window and screamed. Billy Peart's huge palm clapped down viciously on her mouth.

"Don't you do that ag'in," he cried, holding his hand so close over her mouth that she could scarcely breathe.

A moment later, with his free hand, he whipped out a dirty handkerchief, threw it on the cab seat, took a bottle from his pocket and spilled its contents over the handkerchief.

Mary felt the sickening odor of chloroform as the wet handkerchief was roughly forced against her nose and mouth. She struggled with all the strength she had, but Billy Peart held the saturated cloth firmly in place until she had inhaled enough to become unconscious.

When Mary awakened from the anesthetic stupor she found herself in a miserable room. Her head swam. A broken rocker by the side

of the cot on which she lay seemed to move dizzily. It was some time before she could steady herself sufficiently to rise from the cot and totter toward the single window in the room. She looked through the grimy pane and found that night had fallen. The last she remembered was the pressing of the handkerchief over her face in the cab that afternoon. She realized she must have been unconscious for several hours. Evidently Billy Peart had carried her to some country town in the taxicab. The room suggested a cheap hotel. Far off, she saw the yellowish glow of New York City lights against the clouds. She looked down, trying to gauge the distance to the ground.

A sudden noise in the room made her turn. The door behind her was being cautiously opened. She shrank against the wall, ready to spring through the door if opportunity offered.

A hand slipped in and a plate of food was shoved across the floor, and then the door closed abruptly. Mary sprang forward and wrenched at the knob. The door was locked. A sickening nausea seized her as she looked down at the food. The sight of it made her ill. She could not eat at such a time.

Returning to the window, she found it not only locked, but nailed; seemingly an unnecessary precaution at such a height. Taking off one shoe, Mary used it as a hammer in pounding

and prying at the nails until she loosened them. Then, unsnapping the lock, she pushed up on the sash and it slowly rose. Thrusting her head through the aperture, she counted the number of windows directly below. There were four of them. Evidently her room was on the fifth floor, and it would be impossible to reach the ground from there.

A sudden thought came to her. She had read of prisoners escaping by means of bedclothes tied together. Turning to the cot, she tore off the sheets and blankets, knotted them together as she had learned from the seafaring folk on Moseses Island, and fastened one end of the improvised rope to a leg of the cot. She knew that the light cot would give with her weight, but it was too bulky to be pulled through the window, and she felt confident that she could slip down the emergency rope to freedom.

Throwing the other end of the rope out the window, she looked down to find that it hardly reached the second floor. A risky jump awaited her at the bottom, but there was nothing more to add to the bedclothes, and she was afraid to delay longer. Steadying herself, her eyes snapping with resolution, she slipped over the sill, holding tight to it as she prepared to lower herself to the ground. She had hardly secured a good hold when the door flew open and Billy Peart burst into her room.

With courage and assurance completely restored, Mary looked Peart straight in the eye, then let the rope slip through her fingers and slid rapidly to the end of it. There she clung for a moment, looked down to make sure of her landing place, and dropped. Luckily she alighted on her feet, and without a moment's wasted time, hurried away from the hotel and ran down a country road opening before her.

She must have gone a mile before her legs began to lag. Clenching her hands and drawing her lips into a purposeful line, she jogged on until she grew so weak that she staggered. The road was dark and gloomy, but Mary gave no thought to that. She feared that Billy Peart would guess the way she had gone and start in pursuit. Desperately she forged on, in the hope of putting a safe distance between herself and possible pursuit. She floundered into a stretch of mud and, in struggling out of it, felt more severely the exhausting effects of chloroform and hunger.

Ahead, she saw the lights of a town twinkling with promise. She rushed toward them. The beating of a drum came to her taut ears and she thought she heard someone singing. Suddenly the clatter of horses' hoofs on the road behind made her turn. Someone was galloping after her at a reckless pace. She feared it was Billy Peart.

At a turn in the road Mary came out on a lighted street and saw a group of people at a corner only a block away. The sound of the drum and singing came from this crowd, and Mary made out Salvation Army uniforms. She burst into the circle of ardent public preachers just as the horse behind her turned down the street. Feeling safe in the crowded open meeting, she stood panting, forgetful of her dishevelled hair, muddy shoes and dress.

Captain Matthews, of the Army, saw in Mary only another weary soul coming to join his congregation.

"Hallelujah!" he cried fervently. The little circle echoed his jubilation.

The Captain stepped to Mary's side and asked, "Shall we pray for you, sister?"

"No, but you may protect me," answered Mary.

The man at the drum gave a tremendous thump and started a song of triumph. Mary looked up as the horse she had heard passed. A street light revealed the face of its rider. It was Billy Peart. She cast her eyes down, in the hope that he would not recognize her. He gave one glance at the devout circle and rode on.

After another song the religious party broke up. Captain Matthews conducted Mary to the Army headquarters, where she secured a room for the night. As she looked out the window,

after breathing a prayer of thankfulness over her escape, she thought she saw the form of Billy Peart again, slinking in the shadows across the street, but could not be sure. She felt safe for the night at least, and to-morrow some plan would suggest itself when her head was clearer and her nerves refreshed.

In the morning she brushed her clothes, combed her tangled hair and appeared before the Captain as quite a different young lady than he had beheld the night before.

Thanking him for the night's refuge, she asked for a telegraph blank.

"You will stay here a few days until you get rested up?" suggested the officer, who seemed to take more than a religious interest in Mary.

"Why, I believe I will have to stay until I hear from New York. I haven't a penny, and I think it would be wiser to remain here until I get word from a friend." She started to write the telegram, asking, "You said this was Washburn?"

Captain Matthews nodded.

Mary wrote hurriedly:

JOHN WILLIS, New York:
Join me at Salvation Army headquarters, Washburn, N. J. In trouble. Will explain later. MARY.

Captain Matthews took the message and started to the telegraph office without suspecting that as he turned the corner an eager-eyed

little man greatly resembling Billy Peart shuffled out of a doorway across the street from the Army headquarters and trailed him. The honest Captain also failed to notice that as the telegraph operator read Mary's message aloud for possible errors, the anxious little man in country-cut clothes was standing interestedly at his elbow.

If the Captain had suspected Billy Peart's presence, possibly Mary would have been saved the shock and disappointment she had an hour later on receiving the following message in answer to her despatch:

Cannot come. We must not communicate. Danger.
JOHN WILLIS.

Mary flushed deeply and re-read the message. It did not seem possible that Willis could go back on her, but that was the evident inference. Her mouth set firmly. She tossed her head self-reliantly and crumpled the yellow slip in her hand.

There was no trace of anxiety in her smile as she spoke to the Captain a few minutes later: "I must get to New York at once. You people have been so kind to me, I wonder if I can count on you to help me further? The truth is, I believe I will have to stay here the rest of my life unless I can get out quietly in some sort of a disguise."

"Why not join the Army? Then you won't need any disguise," suggested the Captain, with a kindly smile.

"I'll think that over later," said Mary lightly. "Meantime, wouldn't it be all right for me to slip on an Army uniform and go out with the rest so I could reach New York without attracting any attention?" She was still fearful that Billy Peart was keeping close watch of her.

"Why, yes, you might do that," replied the Captain. "I will get you a uniform. We are sending a band of Army lassies to New York this morning to sell *War Cries*. You can go across on the ferry with the others, and if you like, you might sell a few *War Cries* in return for the help the Army has given you. You can leave the money and uniform at any of our branches in New York later."

"That's fine," answered Mary. "I must go at once."

The Captain gave her a uniform, which she quickly donned, joining at once the squad starting for New York to sell *War Cries*. She felt confident that Billy Peart would not recognize her in the plain blue uniform and close-fitting hood.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON BOARD THE "NANCY"

MARY enjoyed the experience of selling *War Cries* along the docks in New York that morning. She felt grateful to the Army for its protection and, having no money with her, wanted to make some tangible return for its hospitality. The novelty of sauntering among huge drays, piled high with incoming and outgoing merchandise, was fascinating. She had never had time to see this side of New York life before. There was some pleasure in acting the part of a Salvation Army lassie and stopping to sell copies of the paper to passersby. The experience appealed to her histrionic sense.

After two hours of the work her pocket jingled with a number of coins and she decided to return to her hotel, make a change of clothes and find out what had become of Willis. The fact that she had received such an unexpected answer to her telegram was disconcerting. She wondered what the trouble could be, and why his attitude seemed to have changed.

As she picked her way along the dock toward

a street car a sailor suddenly stepped up and handed her a quarter.

"Do you want a *War Cry*?" asked Mary.

"No, keep the paper, miss," answered the hulking sailor, with an awkward bow. "You people can always have a piece of change when I've got it. You do a lot of good in the world. By the way," he pulled off his cap and scratched his head dubiously, "there's a poor sailor down in the for'ard cabin of the *Nancy* there." He pointed to his schooner and drew a long face. Mary paused to listen.

"He's a Cape Cod sailor, miss, and we weigh anchor for Boston in ten minutes. He's goin' home mighty sick and may not get there. He's not much for religion, but would it be asking too much if you'd step aboard for just a minute and sort er say somethin' that might let him ease hawser without too much trouble if he slips his moorin's before we get to the next sky pilot?"

Mary hesitated. A vague presentiment of possible danger possessed her. She felt a subtle, indefinable idea that something might happen if she went aboard the schooner; but the man's story seemed sincere.

As she hesitated he sneered slightly. "Oh, all right," he said, "if you don't want to say a word to Jack Spaulding. But ain't the Army

to comfort dying people? Or is it just graft to take up collections?"

Mary felt a flush of hot blood tingling in her face.

"Why, certainly I'll go aboard and do what I can. I'll have time before you sail?"

"Yes, they're hoisting the anchor now. You'd better hurry." He pointed toward a rough looking group of men at a windlass, straining to wind up the heavy anchor chain. "This way, miss." He strode up the gangplank and bent his huge frame down the little companionway doors leading from the deck into the cabin.

Mary followed. They turned into a squalid, dark room amidships and the sailor groped toward a bed, calling out in a hoarse voice, "Lady to see you, Jack. A Salvation Army lass."

"Is this the man?" asked Mary, making out a dim form lying on a berth before her.

"Yes," said the sailor, striking a match. At that moment the companionway doors slammed shut. The heavy anchor banged against the side of the ship and Mary stood staring at the supposed sick man. She fell back a step as she looked straight into the wicked little eyes of Billy Peart.

The big sailor who had guided her down the wharf whipped a sheet from the berth. As it

fell over Mary's head he twisted it tightly about her. Mary heard the mingled splash of the tide and the throb of a tug towing the schooner into mid-channel. The boat was pulling out.

Things had happened so fast that she could hardly understand. Rough hands seated her abruptly on the edge of the bunk. She knew it would be useless to cry out or try to get the sheet off, so she sat quietly, waiting for something to happen, thinking about Billy Peart and wondering how he had penetrated her disguise.

"Well, she's a cool one," she heard the sailor whisper, and the remark made her take the surprising situation all the more calmly.

Through the sheet she saw the light of a lantern and a moment later blinked in the glare of it as the cloth was suddenly jerked from her head.

She found herself alone in the cabin with Billy Peart, who eyed her gloatingly.

"Well, well," he said. "I suppose you forgot all about me after you jumped out the window back in the hotel?"

"I couldn't forget you," answered Mary hotly.

"And I couldn't forget you either," snapped Billy Peart. "I saw you in the crowd with them Salvation shouters. I followed you to headquarters and I sent the answer to that

message you gave the Captain to send to Willis." Billy Peart took pleasure in boasting of his achievements.

"Then John Willis didn't send that answer?" Mary breathed in relief.

"No, and John Willis didn't see you come out of headquarters, dressed in that pretty blue suit an hour later. And John Willis didn't follow you across the ferry either. And John Willis didn't pay fifty dollars of his good money to get you on this boat. But *I* did."

Mary was glad of the explanation. She had wondered how Billy Peart had managed, but now everything was evident; even the fact that he was not the simple storekeeper he had appeared on Moseses Island.

"Well, and what good is it going to do you to have me here?" asked Mary.

Billy Peart sneered. "That's for me to know and you to find out," he answered like a peevish boy. "There's certain parties payin' me pretty well to keep you out of town for a couple of weeks."

The thought of her grandfather's will flashed through Mary's mind. She understood perfectly that the Craigs had hired Billy Peart to kidnap her and keep her away until after her twenty-first birthday when, according to the will, she could make no claim to the fortune. Why hadn't she suspected the telegram Peart

had signed with Willis's name? Why had she gone on blindly stumbling into trouble?

"Now, cheer up and enjoy the viyage." Billy Peart smiled sarcastically. "It's a long swim to shore, and I guess the best thing you can do is sit still and not try to make any trouble." He clumped toward the door, leaving the lantern with Mary.

"But can't I go on deck?" she cried, hating the dirty hole and hoping for a chance to find some means of escape.

"Not till to-morrow morning, when we're well out to sea," answered Billy Peart.

"And don't I get something to eat?" suggested Mary.

"Oh, yes, you'll be well cared for," replied Billy Peart, opening the companionway doors. A moment later Mary saw them close and heard a heavy bar outside drop into place.

She drew a deep breath and looked about her; feeling a certain sense of security in the small cabin and knowing that Billy Peart did not intend to harm her. She must be patient—perhaps—— Her heart thumped against her ribs with the wild ecstasy of an idea. She turned to the little cabin window and attempted to loosen it, but she could not move the heavy iron lever which held the swinging, round glass fast in its metal frame. She could only peer dimly through the thick glass at the curling green

waves with their white fronds, and wonder how long she would be kept captive in that ill-smelling room.

At last the boat began to take the long, swinging ground swells of the open sea.

Mary, a little faint from excitement, lay down on the bunk, listening to the creaking timbers, to the faint footfalls overhead, the rattle of ropes through pulleys, the commands of officers; and then the schooner dipped deeper into the waves and began to roll.

Mary had dozed off when the companionway doors were finally thrown open and a withered-faced but agile old woman, with sharp, prying eyes, shuffled in with a tray of food.

" Here's something for you, dearie, right from the Captain's table," she croaked.

Mary scanned the fare dubiously.

" Well, what's the matter with it? " demanded the belligerent cook. " You didn't expect nightingales' tongues on board the *Nancy*? "

" No," said Mary quietly. " It's quite all right."

The old crone slammed the tray down on the table and started for the door with a contemptuous sniff. Mary picked up a pot of tea from the tray and poured out a cup of the black, acrid brew. She tasted the bitter stuff and, with a grimace, pushed it to one side. Two hulking

potatoes steamed on a plate with a mess of meat. Mary removed them to a saucer and ate with relish after she had accustomed herself to a slight taste of kerosene which seemed to pervade all the food.

After eating, she curled up on the bunk and was soon lulled to sleep by the gentle roll of the old boat. In the morning she was awakened by the thump of the wooden bar outside the companionway doors.

The old woman brought her a breakfast of indescribable hash and a pot of something that smelled like chicory, looked like mud, and tasted like medicine. Mary ate no breakfast. As she sat staring across to the " bull's eye " window the bar was dropped again and this time the face of the sailor who had decoyed her looked in.

" You kin come up on deck," he announced. Mary rushed to the door, anxious for a breath of fresh air. When she reached the deck she stood on the bow and looked about her. Far away to the left was an indistinct shore line. On the other three sides the blue-green waste of white capped waves tossed unbroken. It was evident that the boat was far out at sea. Mary looked wistfully toward land. The distance was too great to swim and she could not be sure of floating there, even if she could conceal a life preserver and find opportunity to slip into the water unnoticed.

She must wait. Perhaps, later on, the boat might be nearer land. Turning her attention to the lifeboats, Mary found three swinging on heavy davits. But she knew that before she could cast off even one loop of the knotted supports she would be hustled below, and even if she could get the boat to the water unseen, she would be certain to be overtaken before she could go a hundred yards.

When the old cook came with a tray of lunch, Mary chose to eat on deck. She remained seated on the bow until late afternoon, watching the shore line anxiously, until she noted that the boat was slowly moving landward.

Just as she was figuring how she might dive overboard and swim to shore unseen, Billy Peart stepped up and ordered her to return to her cabin while the boat made its first port. Mary did not like to admit his authority, but knew there would be trouble in store for her if she didn't. She walked peacefully to the companionway and allowed herself to be locked in.

After a dreary wait in the cabin Mary heard the tramp of feet, the running out of the anchor chain and the rumble of two-wheeled trucks, which told of the arrival at port.

It was quite dusk and the boat was still at anchor, when Mary heard the old cook's footfalls on the companionway steps. She had been revolving in her mind an idea of escape and

was now determined that if the old woman appeared alone she would attempt her plan.

The doors opened and the old hag approached, bearing a supper tray. There was no one with her. Mary, who had been crouching on the bunk with a folded sheet in her hand, leaped forward, threw the white cloth over the startled cook's head, twisted the ends about her scrawny arms, tied a handkerchief over her mouth outside the sheet and lifted her into the berth. There she tied her fast to the heavy slats beneath the mattress and covered her with a blanket.

Congratulating herself on the fact that she had made little noise, Mary slipped to the companionway and looked out on deck. There was no one at hand. She saw the shore line just beyond. Evidently because of some tidal difficulty the *Nancy* had anchored about a quarter of a mile out. But a quarter of a mile of water was not an unsurmountable obstacle to a girl brought up on the sea.

Turning, Mary closed the companionway doors with care, dropped the bar in place, and glided swiftly on hands and knees between the after cabin and the ship's rail. She peered over the side. There lay a boat loosely tied, rocking on the waves. Mary neither hesitated nor looked back. She gripped a hanging rope, swung over the side, and lowered herself hand

over hand until her toes touched the dingey's prow.

She untied the painter and groped in the bottom of the boat for oars. The boat silently slipped away. She threw back her shoulders and bent to the oars, thrilling with the sense of freedom.

Fearing to make directly for port, Mary headed toward a far-off light, pulling steadily.

From lack of food she was not in good condition for a hard row, but the desperate need of reaching land gave her surprising energy. The distance to the light was doubly deceptive at night, but after an hour's work at the oars the friendly light approached. She hummed a little song to keep up her spirits and time her stroke.

" Good old light! " she cried suddenly, turning to find it glaringly near.

The distance had seemed interminable, she had often paused to rest, but now her white even teeth were clenched purposefully and she pulled at the oars like a man.

She felt the strong grip of the flood tide aiding her, and summoned her last ounce of determination, knowing that the tremendous ebb tide would set in shortly and she would be powerless to fight against its terrible seaward pull.

At last the dull boom of the surf echoed among the rocks on which the lighthouse was perched, and the next sweep of the revolving

arc showed Mary a smooth stretch of sand to her left. She pulled desperately with her left oar, whirling the boat's prow in that direction —then, with rejuvenated strength, strove to keep it bow on to avoid being swamped by the great breakers which dashed high and flung themselves against the sand.

Mary felt the lift of the waves beneath the dingey and heard the thunder of the ones ahead as they dashed against the shore. She could see that the ebb tide was setting in and realized with horror that the strip of sea was widening. She made blind, desperate thrusts with the oars. A wave hurled itself against the tiny skiff and sent the stern under. Mary leaped far out to one side, clinging to an oar. She felt the sand of the beach under her and thrust the oar deep down to steady herself against the swirl of the undertow as it clutched at the sand beneath her feet. She leaned forward, and as the next wave boiled up under her arm pits, sprang towards shore and staggered feebly up the wet sand; the wolfish waves roaring angrily behind her and gnashing their great white teeth as though in fury over her escape.

Mary sank exhausted at a safe distance up the beach. She heard the sound of steps, then voices, and suddenly opened her eyes to see a hulking, bearded man leaning over her and lifting her to her feet.

CHAPTER XIX

COBB'S ISLAND

CAPTAIN EBENEZER WATTS peered out over the blue water of the bay at the first traces of smoke on the horizon far to the southwest. He focused his long glass on it, but the vessel was still too low down for even his seasoned vision to determine its character. So he turned with a grunt of impatience and began fitting fresh carbons in the great, triple-faced lantern of the lighthouse tower, after which he polished the reflectors and lenses until no speck of soot or dust marred their iridescence. And, as he worked, he talked to himself in hoarse whispers.

"Wonder who that Salvation Army woman is, anyhow? 'N how'd she come to be floatin' around in an open boat off'n Cobb's Island? 'Tain't reasonable, nohow. 'N Edna says when she woke up this morning and asked where she was, she never yelled 'Glory!' at all; jest laid back and went off to sleep again!"

He descended the spiral iron stairs, clutching the handrail to steady his aged sea legs and grappling with the perplexing mystery that had drifted to the island sands the night before.

His daughter looked up from her work as he entered.

"How's she gettin' along?" he demanded.

"Oh, she's all right, except she's lame from her long row. I took her in some breakfast and she ate it in bed. But she's almost dressed—here she comes."

"Good-morning, Captain!"

Mary Craig's cheery greeting and smile were irresistible.

"Mornin'!" answered the lightkeeper. "How'd you know I was a captain?"

"Oh, that's easy." Mary pointed to the sextant hanging on the wall. "I used to live on an island with sailors. Only men who are navigators have instruments like those."

"Who be ye?" Captain Watts was curious, terse and direct.

"My name is Mary Craig. My home is New York."

"That's a long ways from here," replied the ex-skipper, his scrutiny deepening. "Come all the way in that little dingey?"

"Only from the schooner," laughed Mary. "I went on board to talk with a sick man, and they sailed out before I could get off. Last night I thought I'd start back again, but the shore was farther away than it seemed."

"You was plum tuckered out when I found you," said her inquisitor. Mary nodded.

"I want to thank you for your hospitality, Captain. Do the steamers touch here?"

"Nary a steamer. Cobb's Island, Miss Craig, don't amount to much, and then, ag'in, it amounts to a good deal. If it wasn't fer this here light, steamers would have to go up the outside passage. As it is, they can feel their way through without trouble. Outside of the light there's only the fishing folks and a few summer visitors. Be you in a hurry to git back to the mainland?"

"Oh, yes. Is there any boat I can take?" Mary's quick reply did not disclose her anxiety.

"Your best chance is to ketch a revenoo cutter—we call 'em lighthouse tenders. One ought to be in some time to-day with our month's supplies. Goes back to Fall River, from here. You kin git a train there to the city. But I don't know whether they'll take you or not—it's a government boat, and her commander may, 'nd ag'in, he may not."

"Is there anything I can do until the boat arrives?"

"I'm going down to the village to do a little shopping," spoke up Edna. "Would you like to go along and see the island?"

"Would I?" Mary flung back the words with an eager ripple of laughter, as she hurried into the other room for her Salvation bonnet. The suggestion was a relief to her. Captain Watts

had a very peculiar way of evidencing his desire to know much more than she had told him. Besides, her nostrils longed for the tang of the salt breeze whipping across the sterile little bunch of rocks on which the island light perched. It reminded her of Moseses Island and the care-free days, before so many things began to "happen," only it was much smaller.

The two girls strolled down the sandy path, Mary filling her lungs with the invigorating air and plying her companion with queries about lighthouse life. There was much art behind her tactful questions. So long as Edna was kept busy explaining the interesting things on Cobb's Island, so long Mary herself had fewer explanations to make.

"Isn't it darling?" Mary pointed to the little cottage they were passing. Flowers bloomed along the graveled path leading up to the low, broad porch, honeysuckles rioted up toward the roof, and behind the trellis sat a placid, elderly woman knitting. It was like a cameo of the long ago, and Mary felt a little tightening in her throat and brushed something from her eyes that was not all spray from the great breakers booming at their feet. It was so peaceful and homelike; no brutal-faced ruffians, no plotting financiers, no strange or unexplainable things, no feverish struggle in the web of circumstance, no nerve-racking transition to a new and

dangerous environment. Like the flow of the tides the currents of life beat with a regular rhythm on Cobb's Island.

Mary found herself lost in a daydream. She knew at that moment what she would do if she ever got any of her grandfather's money. She would buy a yacht and return to Moseses Island; she would sail by the serene, peaceful little seafaring town, circle around it and then land at Cap'n Jogifer's pier. She would do nice things for Aunt Liza and the Captain; possibly take them around the world in her yacht. But that was all far in the dim future.

She returned to the present with an effort, talking to the simple lighthouse girl and looking about her as they walked along toward the long wharf on the other side of the tiny island.

Edna pointed to a smoke cloud far out on the bay.

"Tender's coming," she said. "There's your chance, Mary, if they'll take you back to Fall River."

"Oh, surely they will, won't they? Why, I'll pay them when I get back to New York—I wasn't intending to come so far."

"We'll see," Edna nodded her head sagely. "If they don't, well, we won't borrow any trouble. The men in the navy are rather nice," she added, with a blush. "At least, I know one that is a perfect gentleman."

"Why, look at all the people!" Mary's ejaculation of surprise seemed justified. "Are they going down to meet the boat, Edna?"

"No; they're looking at you," frankly returned the other girl. "Nobody hardly ever comes here, least of all Salvation people. And they're wondering how you came."

Mary was plainly embarrassed and whispered to Edna: "I think we'd better go back to the house, if you don't mind."

Captain Watts heard her with a little less of his taciturn manner on their return. Mary's frankness and earnestly expressed wish to leave on the cutter, if it could be arranged, finally appealed to his vanity.

"I'll use my inflooence," he stiffly announced, as the hoarse siren sounded.

"Thank you," returned Mary. "I am very grateful, Captain, and some day I shall find a way to show you how much I appreciate your kindness." Mentally she was manning her dream-yacht with all the people who had been kind to her. She would take them all on a long trip around the world, maybe.

The crowd at the wharf scattered as the trio went down to the trim, immaculate cutter. They knew Captain Watts and his rage when roused. After a short conversation, the old seadog beckoned to Mary. The commander raised his

cap deferentially, as she tripped up the gang-plank.

"Captain Watts says that you are very desirous of going back to Fall River this afternoon."

"I do wish it could be arranged." The appeal in Mary's voice was emphasized by her eyes.

"It's a little out of routine duty, but the regulations leave such matters to the judgment of the officer in command," he returned. "Of course, I shall be glad to help you. Have you any baggage you wish to take with you?"

"None." Mary's bewitching smile of relief enmeshed the officer. He forgot to wonder at her presence there or at the absence of even a hand-bag. He was conscious only of the radiant transformation which his decision had worked. He watched eagerly, as Mary turned and ran out to kiss Edna good-by. The lighthouse supplies were on the dock, Captain Watts handed him the official receipt, the siren sounded and they glided out into the dancing blue waters of the glorious noonday—so different from the same turbulent waves over which Mary had floated the night before.

Mary, seated under the striped awning on the revenue cutter, turned for a last look at the lighthouse sinking into the blue waters of the bay far behind. Lieutenant Loyd Cowans

walked aft and took a chair near her. It would be two hours before the cutter would reach Fall River, and he was not needed on the bridge until they again neared the shore, except in emergencies. So the lieutenant, to whom duty denied many social engagements, accepted thankfully the gift the gods had sent his way. There was something besides spirituality, however, which made him wish to see more of the piquant face framed in by the hideous bonnet, and he wondered why such a girl should prefer the tambourine to the pianoforte and a Salvation Army barracks to the waxed floor of a Newport ballroom.

Mary turned at his approach, and pointed to the low-lying smoke cloud which the rising breeze was dispersing along the horizon.

"I have been wondering what that could be?" she said, with the direct manner and winsome smile which he found so charming.

He whipped his binoculars to his eyes as he rose.

"Too far to make it out distinctly," he replied, "but from the smoke it might be a vessel in distress, if it isn't a big excursion steamer from Boston." He swept the intervening circle. "There's a little skiff pulling for Cobb's Island," he resumed. "A seaman and a frowsy looking fellow with a slouch hat in it."

Mary's heart gave one throb of anxiety, an-

other of thanksgiving. Could it be that Billy Peart had traced her to the lighthouse island? She glanced up at the lieutenant.

"Want to look at them?" he asked, passing her the glass.

Mary steadied it on the boat. Her eyes had been accustomed to the sea from earliest childhood. A slight alteration of the focus revealed the man in the bow of the boat quite clearly.

"Billy Peart," she whispered under her breath. A look of slight anxiety clouded her face. She knew the dogged determination of her foster father and was certain he would follow her to New York, perhaps manage to get on the same train with her if Captain Watts gave him the information he was evidently seeking.

Mary's face grew serious as she wished she had warned the lighthouse Captain to say nothing about her visit to the island. She wondered why she had not had the forethought to discard her Salvation Army costume that had surely left a trail of identity behind.

The lieutenant misunderstood the gravity of her expression. "Don't worry, Miss Craig," he said reassuringly. "They can make the island easily. Even if they did give out, someone would send a boat to the rescue."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" breathed Mary, relieved to know just where Peart was, and satisfied that she had a fair start.

Her relief brought a smile to the commander's face. But he did not know that Mary intended the remark to apply to herself and not to the skiff adrift on the same blue waters over which she had struggled the night before.

The short trip to land was soon over, and Mary thanked Lieutenant Cowans happily.

"I am glad to have been of service," he said. "I only regret that your duties in the army and mine in the navy necessitate so brief an acquaintance."

Mary overlooked the earnestness in his eyes as she swung down the gangplank and walked up the Fall River wharf to the depot.

The lieutenant accompanied her and bought her ticket to New York with the money Mary had collected selling *War Cries.* She decided to borrow it in her need and repay it as soon as she reached her hotel.

"You must change at Rouse Junction for the express," said the lieutenant, handing her the ticket. "You will be back in New York by nine o'clock."

Mary sank down with relief in a day coach seat. So far, Billy Peart had not caught up with her, and it looked as though she would leave him far behind. But suddenly the thought came that she would be safer if someone met her in New York. She hurriedly scrawled a telegram to Willis, though it hurt her pride a little

to call on him when she had received no answer to her former wire. Though Billy Peart had sent the message in John Willis's name that had caused her to leave Washburn, she still thought it strange that Willis had not communicated with her in any way.

Giving the message to the lieutenant, she asked him to send it. Then the train jolted forward, she waved her hand back gaily to the courteous officer and settled down comfortably to look out the window. Bits of forest, peaceful pastures and little white houses snuggling close to big red barns seemed like the stage-setting of a pleasant dream as she whirled by. They looked so restful and quiet. Mary thought again of the day when she would inherit her grandfather's money. If that day ever came she would buy an automobile, after the yacht, and spend a whole year touring the country, seeing everything, and stopping each night to sleep at a different farmhouse.

The train curved suddenly out on the side of a hill and the valley panorama below spread out pleasantly before her as the laboring engine puffed heavily up the grade. Just as it burst into a tunnel, Mary caught sight of an auto skimming along below at a rapid rate.

When the train emerged from the tunnel and rolled leisurely down the other side of the hill to Rouse Junction, she looked again for the

speeding motor, and not seeing it, thought that the train must have outdistanced it.

She alighted from the local and stepped into the station to read the bulletin board. The express was on time; but there was twenty minutes to wait. During that time Mary continually reproached herself for giving away to the fear that Billy Peart might catch up with her, but she could not force the idea from her mind.

She was glad when the train caller announced the Boston-New York express. She looked forward to seeing Willis again and telling him all that had happened.

The speeding wheels of the express played a rhythmic lullaby that soon soothed her to sleep. She had had little enough in the last three or four days.

The train had passed New London and New Haven before Mary awakened. She sat up abruptly, seemed to feel someone's eyes focused on her, and turned instinctively to look at the occupant of the seat behind her.

With a shudder she caught a glimpse of Billy Peart's evil, glowering face just before he ducked behind a newspaper. Mary was amazed to find him on the train. She realized in an instant that he must have gained the land from Cobb's Island almost as quickly as she had. The memory of the speeding auto assured her

that that was the means by which Billy Peart had reached Fall River in time to catch the express.

His face had haunted her for four days. It seemed that every time she managed to slip away he followed closely, like a bloodhound. But now she was certain that no further danger lurked in his presence. She had the protection of people, the car was full; besides, the conductor sat just across the aisle from her, sorting tickets.

Willis would meet her in New York and everything would be all right. But, having been disappointed once by Willis, Mary began to worry. She thought she had best throw Billy Peart off the track if possible. He was hard to fool, but she felt equal to it.

After groping for some ruse to solve the situation, Mary suddenly picked up her bonnet, which she had laid to one side, and put it on. An idea had suggested itself and she was determined to try it. The train was slowing down for a stop.

Mary started down the aisle away from Peart.

"What station is this?" she asked the brakeman in a low tone.

"Bridgeport."

"And the next stop?"

"Grand Central, New York."

"Thank you," said Mary, realizing that the time was ripe to test her scheme.

She had taken her seat check and thrust it into her sleeve. As the train came to a stop, she hesitated for a moment, then slipped through the vestibule and jumped off, glancing back to see Billy Peart rush after her. But several passengers intervened, and Mary had plenty of time in which to run the length of a car and clamber up into the next coach, where she found a seat near a window. Shielding her face, she looked out to see Billy Peart running around in circles, peering up into the faces of the passengers who had alighted and seeming beside himself with anger at having lost track of Mary so quickly and completely.

She smiled with the satisfaction that she was as clever at detective work as he. The train pulled out, leaving Peart bewildered on the platform. Mary, her mind finally at rest, looked forward eagerly to the next stop. When, after an interminable while, the trainman shouted "Grand Central," Mary moved forward and was first to alight.

She looked about for Willis and, on going through the gate, a smile leaped to her lips as he sprang from the crowd of waiters.

He grasped her hands and looked anxiously into her face.

"Are you all right?" he asked, in deep con-

cern. "I've had half the detectives in New York on your trail since I got your message from Washburn."

"You could have saved yourself that trouble if you had sent me an answer saying you would come," said Mary slowly, looking him straight in the eyes. "I didn't think you would fail."

"I did answer that I'd come," he said earnestly, "and I was there in a machine just ten minutes too late. Captain Matthews showed me the ferry boat you had just gone on, but it was in mid-stream already. When I finally did get across I searched the docks. But you were not to be found. I went to your hotel. You hadn't been there, and then I got detectives. I was so worried."

"And all that time," said Mary, "I was down in the hold of the *Nancy*. But I'm awfully glad you were really worried about me." She gave him a very intimate, personal smile, which made him reach out impulsively and squeeze her hands.

Mary allowed her hands to linger in his for a moment and then jerked them away. "Business before pleasure," she laughed. "What have you heard about the will?"

CHAPTER XX

THE CONFESSION

"The greatest news ever," answered Willis. "If I hadn't been worried to death about you probably I could have done more, but as it is, everything is arranged."

"I am really going to get all that money?" asked Mary.

"In spite of the Craigs," he smiled, seating himself beside her in the comfortable car and directing the driver to the hotel from which Peart had lured her.

"Haven't they given up, now that they're in jail?"

"I should say not. Jail is an easy place for rich men, and they managed the funds of the bank so they still have plenty of resources for crooked work. They had a clever lawyer who's left no stone unturned to help them get out. While I've been working on proofs of who you really are, to present to the executors of your grandfather's will, I've had to keep watch of the Craigs and their lawyer, too, for fear they would get out on some legal technicality and upset all my plans."

"Do I have to prove who I am to really get my money?" asked Mary.

"Yes," said Willis seriously, "and I'm afraid we'll encounter some difficulty. But I've had men on Moseses Island getting all the facts they could and I'm thinking I can find the nurse who cared for you at your grandfather's home and get her to identify you from a baby picture." He reached into his pocket and took out an old-fashioned cabinet photograph.

"You see, I haven't been idle," he said, handing it to Mary.

She looked at the photograph by the light of a small electric globe in the taxicab.

"Why," she cried, gazing at the cherubic face of a very pretty little girl baby, gazing up seriously from the depths of a pillowy bassinet. "That can't be a picture of me."

"It is," said Willis. "I got it from Henry, your grandfather's old butler. He will identify you from that picture before the executors." Willis extended his hand to take the picture.

Mary started to slip it into her waist. "No, I must keep it," she smiled. "I believe it is the only picture I have ever had taken."

"That is why I cherish it," said Willis, with a soft light in his fond, affectionate eyes. "Please let me have it. You can't imagine how attached to it I became while you were gone and I was afraid . . ."

"Do you really want it as much as that?" cried Mary, strangely stirred by the ardent look he gave her.

"I want it more than I dare tell you," he whispered.

Mary handed it back, their finger-tips met and both thrilled with the warm contact.

Mary sat up stiffly and forced her thoughts back to the present. "But do you think I can really prove who I am?"

Willis smoothed his palm over the picture and placed it tenderly in his breast pocket. Then he answered slowly: "We must get this Billy Peart. I've learned all about him now. I know that he communicated with the Craigs in prison and was sent after you to keep you out of the way until you were past twenty-one. I believe his confession will be needed to substantiate your claim to the money and clear up the mystery of the kidnapping nearly twenty-one years ago."

"But do you think we can get the truth from him?"

"I'm almost sure we can. I've learned that he is not above money. He has worked for the Craigs with the expectation of gain. He has lost any reward from them through losing track of you, and now I've a notion he will look for some way to be reimbursed for the money he has spent in pursuit of you."

"But how will we find him? I wish I hadn't left him back in Bridgeport, but I was afraid you wouldn't meet me," said Mary wistfully.

"He'll turn up in New York to-morrow, maybe to-night. He'll go direct to your hotel and inquire about you, that's sure. I'll have a dozen detectives there waiting to give him a cordial reception."

"Splendid!" cried Mary. "But are you sure he will go to my hotel?"

"Yes; he knows you won't be traveling around New York in this outlandish Salvation Army uniform any longer. He knows you left your things at the hotel, and that's where he'll look first. I'm certain of it."

The taxicab stopped at the hotel at that moment and Mary alighted. Willis waited in the lobby while she slipped up to her room and put on an evening dress. Joining him in the dining room later, they sat over a late supper enjoying each other's society far more than the creature comforts of food and drink.

"Oh, I do hope we can make Billy Peart tell the whole truth about how I first went to Moseses Island. I've always wondered. Do you think Richard Craig had me kidnapped?"

"I don't know," said Willis thoughtfully. "I've considered that. But it doesn't seem possible that he could have been so criminal-minded even then. I have always liked him un-

til the last few years, when I began to suspect his manipulations at the bank. You know after you were kidnapped a note came to your grandfather demanding a large sum for your return. Your grandfather was sick at the time, the police got hold of the letter asking for ransom and sent worthless paper in place of the genuine article. Detectives were on hand to catch the man who came to claim the money. The poor fellow was shot, and your grandfather died shortly, regretting with his last breath that the police had not allowed him to send the real money on the chance of getting you back. You were very dear to him."

"Yes," said Mary, looking across the table with moist eyes. "I must have been dear to somebody. It is very pleasant to know that someone loved me once."

"But someone loves you now," said Willis, leaning impulsively toward her and dropping his hand gently over hers. "I love you. You must have read it in my eyes. I loved you that day you came as fresh as a flower into Jackson's sordid theatrical office. I have loved you every minute since, but I've been afraid to speak. I have admired your plucky struggle. You are all that is beautiful and lovable in the world to me." His voice trembled with sincerity.

Mary did not remove her hand at once. It

was very pleasant to feel that someone in the world really cherished her. She had seen so much of hate that love was a heaven she had hardly dared dream of.

Willis went on eagerly. "I can't keep it back longer. We must get married, dear. I want to be with you always, to protect you, to help you, to love you. Don't you know what I mean? Won't you say something, please? Say you love me, too." He gripped her hand tensely.

Mary slowly looked up, her breast palpitating with emotion. She gazed straight into his clean, fine, manly eyes and knew that he was the only man in the world who had inspired the wonderful thrill of romantic affection in her. But she had only begun life, she had only tasted freedom and felt that she must not tie herself down in any way until she was sure.

Slowly, with a painful catch in her voice, showing the effort with which she spoke, Mary answered, "I respect you, I have never known anyone I could be more sure of. But I must wait. I am so inexperienced. I want to be sure before I give you my answer. I'm like a plant stunted in a dark garden nearly all its life that sees light for the first time. I am out in the sun now. I must bask in it. You must see how I feel."

"I know I haven't any right to hope for such

wonderful happiness, but say you like me anyway. That will make me smile with joy for a month. I believe it is your right to see the world. I would feel like a cad to say more now. If you want experience, and I think every girl needs it, let me help you, will you? Let me be where I can see you every day and advise you."

"But wouldn't that be dangerous?" trembled Mary, slowly withdrawing her hand.

"No. You can rely on me. I won't speak of love again until you allow me to. We'll make that a compact."

"All right," answered Mary. "I don't want to make it hard for you. But you must understand. I want to do things. I want to see the world and meet people."

"Nothing more natural," answered Willis, his eyes fixed hungrily upon her. He drew himself up short and exerted all his will power to make good his promise. "From now on we are brother and sister, until—until you are satisfied that I meant what I said just now."

"Nothing could suit me better," said Mary happily. "I don't want the responsibilities of marriage now. I want to be care-free, heart-easy. Some day . . . But we must not talk about that now."

She rose and extended her hand in farewell.

"Until morning," breathed Willis.

Mary walked to her room as one in a dream. A comfortable feeling of happiness pervaded her spirit. She wanted to sing. She was loved. At last someone whom she could respect and trust had given her what she had longed for. She was loved by a fine strong man, and there was certain elation in it.

In the morning she had hardly breakfasted when Willis sent up to ask if he could see her. Mary met him in a parlor downstairs.

"Well," he beamed. "We have Billy Peart!"

"Already!" gasped Mary.

"Yes; as I expected, he came right to your hotel as soon as he reached town this morning. One of the detectives spotted him. He is at my office now. I wanted to come and get you to hear what he has to say."

"Has he agreed to confess?"

"For a thousand dollars, yes."

"It is certainly worth that," answered Mary. "I can pay him out of my own money."

"We will arrange that later," answered Willis, accompanying her to his office.

There sat Billy Peart, sullen, but no longer defiant. He looked up at Mary as she entered, but his gaze was more curious than angry.

"Well," said Willis, drawing up chairs for Mary and a stenographer who was to take down the confession. "Let's get to business." He

counted out a thousand dollars in large bills. Peart eyed the money greedily and reached out to take it.

"Just a minute," said Willis, putting the compact bunch of money under a paperweight on his desk. "You get that when you have told everything you know, and not until."

"Well, I'm ready," said Billy Peart grumpily.

"Then tell us all about the kidnapping of Mary Craig. When did you first meet her uncle, Richard Craig?"

"It was near twenty-five years ago," answered Billy Peart. "He sailed past Moseses Island on one of them yachts. Something gave out on it and they had to stop at the island. I put 'em up and did several little jobs for Mr. Craig. He took my name and address and told me I might hear from him later."

"And when did you hear from him next?" prompted Willis, turning to see that the stenographer was taking down all of Billy Peart's story.

"In about a year he sent for me to do something for him in New York."

"You needn't tell what it was. The purpose of this is not to incriminate you. We won't use any of your confession against you, as I promised before," said Willis reassuringly.

"Well, I did little jobs for him off and on

and he paid me good money," continued Peart. "In the spring when Mary was born he sent for me and said he had a job that would pay me a thousand dollars, and a little more money for a good many years to come. Anxious to turn an honest penny, I did what he wanted me to. He told me about Mary here, how her grandfather thought the world and all of her, but he thought the baby oughtn't to be spoiled by being brought up in a fine home. He said it would be better to have her brought up in a simple home, and I agreed to take her to Moseses Island."

"You kidnapped her?" asked Willis bluntly.

"Well, some people call it that, but Richard Craig was the real kidnapper, I only worked under his orders. He gave me a key to the house and waited outside the night I went in and got the baby. The nurse was asleep and the house was quiet when I picked her out of her bed and took her downstairs. She didn't even cry. I opened a window in the kitchen to make it look like I went out that way and then I went out the front door and locked it after me."

Mary sat wide-eyed, holding her breath as she heard the real story of her life for the first time.

"Richard Craig was waiting outside. He paid the money and I took the kid to Moseses Island. He said I'd hear from him later on."

"And when did you hear from him again?" asked Willis.

"Only a few days later. He wrote to me and sent me a letter that I copied and mailed. The letter was to ask old man Craig for money and say that Mary would be returned if the money was left at some shoe store on Grand Street. Richard Craig explained to me that this was only a game to make his father think he didn't have a hand in it. Nobody was to show up for the money, he said, and it was his opinion that his father wouldn't send any real money anyway, but would try to catch the kidnapper."

"So that's it," mused Willis, turning to Mary with a significant look. "Richard Craig hoped to make it look as though the kidnappers had been scared off and hadn't come for the money. Then his father would despair of ever getting Mary back and probably leave all his money to Richard or his little son, Henry?"

"Yes. Luck played into his hands, too. It always has. I read in the paper some days later that detectives shot a man in front of the shoe store on the night the money was sent and everybody said he was the kidnapper and that the baby would never be returned now. That made Craig and me feel pretty happy and pretty safe."

"Well, that's an interesting confession," re-

marked Willis. "Now, after this you saw Richard Craig several times and communicated with him about Mary?"

"Yes, every once in a while I would run over to New York and get money from him. But for a while he was hard up and dodged me. I was pretty mad then and I thought I'd never get another cent for boarding and keeping the girl."

That explained to Mary the period when she had had to work in the store.

"But he came through with five hundred when Mary was about twelve or fourteen, and I bought her shoes and put her in school. Nobody can say I ain't done my best by her."

"You will go before the executors and positively identify Mary Craig?" asked Willis.

"Yes. If you promise there ain't no trouble in it."

"Nobody will trouble you. This story will not be used against you," replied Willis. "I've arranged for a meeting of the executors this morning and we will all go over now."

Mary stepped out of the office and walked at Willis's side to a nearby building, where they found the executors waiting for them, with Henry, Grandfather Craig's old valet, the nurse who had cared for Mary and sundry other witnesses.

Willis presented Mary's claim in a lawyerlike

manner, and it was not long before he had established her identity beyond a shadow of a doubt. The executors nodded in consultation for a few moments and then made formal announcement of the fact that Mary was heir to an estate estimated at six millions.

"Six millions!" gasped Mary, feeling faint and hardly able to believe that such an amount could really be hers.

At Mary's request Willis was appointed her guardian and, after congratulations from everybody present, she was whisked away to her hotel in a motor with Willis. Her head was spinning with the day's developments. She could not answer Willis when he spoke to her. All she wanted to do was dream—dream of the glorious future that lay before her.

CHAPTER XXI

HOME

A WEEK later, when Mary had grown somewhat used to the fact that she was one of the richest young women in America, she sent for Willis. He came to her at once, asking to be of service as he always did.

"I've been planning for a long time now what to do with my money," said Mary. "Ever since I've had it I haven't lived any differently, except to have two glasses of café parfait at luncheon instead of one. I want to do something more exciting than that."

"Well, I guess any desire in the world you have can be easily satisfied," smiled Willis. "Your income is a little more than a third of a million a year, and it certainly ought to be spent."

"I still think I'm dreaming." Mary smiled happily. "But since the dream seems to have come true, the first thing I'd like to do is to get Uncle Richard and Cousin Henry out of jail."

"Out of jail? Well, that is an odd wish."

"You said money could do anything. Can't it do that?"

"Why, yes. I suppose so."

"I think they've had their lesson, and really, I feel awfully yellow that I helped put them there. They can't trouble me now that I have the money, and I think if they were let out they'd do their best to right the wrongs they have done."

"Well, that sounds promising, anyway. We'll try it. I'll give the work to my lawyer. He can establish a connection with Craig's lawyer and perhaps effect something. But what do you want to do for yourself?"

"Oh," said Mary, with a delicious sigh, "I want to buy the finest yacht in America and go around the world."

"That's easy," answered Willis. "Harry Wayne was saying at the club just last night that he wanted to sell the *Albatross*. That's the very boat for you. You can get it for half a year's income."

"Please buy it for me," ordered Mary, with a thrill in her voice.

"You must go to see it first."

"No. I'm sure it's just what I want, if you say so. I'd like to have it fitted out right away with everything necessary for a six months' voyage. I was reading in the paper yesterday about some party that cruised up the Amazon River. I want to do that first, and then around the world."

"You'll want the same crew that Wayne had, I presume?" asked Willis, entering into the proposed adventure with a spirit of youthful exuberance that fascinated Mary.

"Yes, all but the Captain," she answered.

"You aren't going to try to run the ship yourself?" asked Willis, not feeling perfectly sure at just what point such a capable, ambitious girl would stop.

"No," smiled Mary. "I'm sure I haven't had enough experience at navigation for that, but I know someone who has."

"Who is it?"

"That's going to be a mystery for the present," replied Mary. "You can engage the present Captain for a week. After that I'll supply my own."

"Are you saving a place for me on the crew?" queried Willis, his admiring eyes seeking hers.

"Oh, yes, you're to be cabin boy."

"I'm to go along, then?" he asked eagerly.

"Everybody that I like is going along," answered Mary with enthusiasm. "I want to find Daisy Meade right away and get her to go. The season is almost over, she's worked hard all her life, the rest will do her good, and I owe a lot to her. If it hadn't been for Daisy, I might never have known who I am."

"Yes, I think Daisy has played an important

part in both our lives. If it hadn't been for her, I would never have known you at all."

"And Mr. Rayner. He was awfully good to me at the office. I used to hear him say he wished he could get away from business for a while. Well, he's going to, this time."

"And Dundon?" suggested Willis laughingly.

"No, I never did like him. But honestly, if I knew Madam Jolatsky's address I'd ask her."

"It's just as well that you don't," smiled Willis. "She might steal your boat and blame the crime on you."

"Lieutenant Strakey. I might take him, too," said Mary musingly, "only I'm afraid you and he would quarrel."

"You're going to have quite a party," remarked Willis.

"It would be rather lonesome going alone, wouldn't it?" she answered. "Besides, I've promised myself this trip for a long time and I had decided to take everybody, but there are so few I can think of when the time really comes. Oh, yes. I want an orchestra on board."

"Is that all?" asked Willis, with a boyish twinkle in his eyes. "Sure you don't want to make it a band?"

"No," answered Mary, impatient to be alone with her dreams again. "Now please run

along and do those things. Ask Mr. Rayner and Daisy Meade for me, too. How soon do you think you can have the boat ready?"

"Why, I suppose it's all ready now. All we have to do is put provisions on board. We could start next Monday," suggested Willis eagerly. "The boat happens to be in New York harbor at present."

"Well, then we'll say Monday." Mary clapped her hands happily.

Willis withdrew. Mary did not see him again until Sunday, when he called to tell her that all arrangements had been made and the boat was ready to start at her order. He told her that both Mr. Rayner and Daisy Meade were anxious to go; as for his own eagerness for the trip, his eyes spoke for him.

Mary had bought enough clothes to half fill the stowing space on the yacht. The novelty of not having to give a thought to price was intoxicating. Whatever she liked she bought, letting fancy run free.

On Monday the little party met at the boat. Mary had purposely put off seeing her yacht until the day of sailing, that her dream might be all the more wonderful.

She gasped at the great shining vessel with its gleaming mahogany and brass. No boat like that had ever sailed up the bay past Moseses Island. This was a royal boat, the kind Cleo-

patra must have used in floating down the Nile, only a whole lot more modern, thought Mary.

On board she found everything trim and shipshape. The appointments were remarkable, but she did not stand in awe of their splendor.

"Isn't it going to be great?" she cried in girlish enthusiasm as she stood in the bow with Willis, Rayner and Daisy Meade, while the sailors, all dressed in blue and gilt uniforms, cast off.

The Captain stepped up to Mary and asked what port she wanted to make first.

"Why, Moseses Island, in the bay, off the coast of Maryland! Where did you suppose?" cried Mary, wondering why everyone didn't know just where she longed to go.

She stood at the shining brass rail as the graceful yacht skimmed across New York harbor, like a beautiful big seagull on the waves. She thought of the two sea trips she had had since leaving Moseses Island. The journey abroad had been fascinating, yet it had been fraught with danger. The trip to Boston in the hold of the boat on which Billy Peart had kidnapped her was a loathsome recollection. At last she could stretch out at her ease, at peace with the world.

It was a gay little party that assembled in the dining saloon that night and toasted the new owner of the *Albatross*. Mary was pleased

that Daisy Meade and Mr. Rayner seemed to enjoy each other. Rayner, with his calm, fatherly manner, almost took the place of a chaperon, and he treated Mary and Daisy as though they were his daughters.

Next day the speedy yacht turned into the bay and headed for Moseses Island. Mary sat alone in the bow, lying back in a steamer chair, wrapped snugly in a fleecy rug.

Gradually familiar points of land appeared. She strained her eyes ahead for a sight of Moseses Island. At last it came into view, a low, flat stretch of land disfigured by a motley collection of watermen's shacks. Mary could not believe her eyes. After seeing some of the world, Moseses Island looked strangely shrunken and bare.

Willis stepped to her side and asked, "Well, how does it feel to get back home?"

She did not answer immediately; but sat gazing at him musingly. He looked so much like the handsome men who had skimmed past Moseses Island in gleaming white yachts in her girlhood. She glanced down at the gorgeous steamer rug enfolding her. Her face crimsoned with the thought that she herself must look like one of those young ladies she had envied from Cap'n Jogifer's catboat.

"Home?" she repeated, recalling Willis's question. Her eyes took on a dreamy look and

she turned her gaze far out to sea. "That's my home," she said slowly. "The ocean. I'm going to be a rover, a wanderer from now on, until I get good and sick of it."

"Good enough," smiled Willis, seating himself beside her.

But the boat was drawing close to the island and Mary had no time to talk. She slipped out of the rug, hurried to the Captain and pointed out Cap'n Jogifer's pier, which ran far into the water and offered depth enough to float the long, trim yacht.

Then Mary stood in the bow, quivering with excitement, hardly realizing yet that the boat was really hers.

She made out a white-haired figure working with some sails near the shack at the end of the dock.

"Cap'n Jogifer!" cried Mary, gauging the distance of the boat from the pier. She jumped to the rail, steadied herself by an awning support and, before Willis could stop her, leaped across the four foot gap of water and landed fairly on the pier.

Running up the rough wooden planking, she threw her arms about the old man's sunburned neck and kissed him on both red cheeks.

"Why," cried Cap'n Jogifer, holding Mary off at arm's length. "Blessed if it ain't you. I wouldn't have knowed you from one of them

fine-lookin' women wearin' dresses in the show windows over to Truscott."

Accepting the compliment in the spirit it was meant, Mary turned to point to the yacht, which was being made fast to the pier.

"That's mine!" she cried. "Come and see it?"

"Yours!" Cap'n Jogifer beamed incredulously. With the interest of an old sailor he approached the boat.

"Why, she's a beauty," he cried. "How'd you ever get her? I heard somethin' in town about your gettin' some money. Did ye earn that boat on the stage or punchin' a typewriter?"

"Neither," laughed Mary.

As Willis came running anxiously up the pier to reprove her for her rash jump, she introduced him to Cap'n Jogifer.

"This is the new boat Captain I was telling you about," she said glowingly, turning to the old sailor. "How will you like that, Cap'n?"

"*Me,* Captain of *that* boat?" he repeated, having difficulty in understanding. He approached the trim skiff and gingerly rubbed his fingers caressingly along its varnished rail. "I couldn't expect to run a finer boat in heaven."

"You're going to run this one here on earth, and right now," beamed Mary. "Come," she

took Willis by one hand, the Captain by the other, and led the way to Billy Peart's store. "I'm going to take Aunt Liza with us. She needs a rest."

Mary had some difficulty in persuading her foster mother to leave Moseses Island, but as Billy Peart had stayed at home for only a day after his trip to New York and then left abruptly for the West, Aunt Liza finally decided it would serve him right not to find her on his return. Mary forbade her taking any of her worn, old clothes, telling her they would stop at the next port for a complete new outfit.

When the happy little party returned to the boat all the village was down at the pier to gaze at the wonder and gossip about Mary. Tuck Wintergreen stood open-mouthed in their midst. He pulled off his slouch hat awkwardly and, as Mary approached, executed a bow with all the grace of a sea-lion.

Mary shook hands all around and then put Cap'n Jogifer in charge of the ship. He sat amazed in his cabin, looking at a new uniform Mary had provided in advance.

"It don't seem possible," he said, with a mist in his eyes. "Things don't generally happen that-a-way in this world. Here you've got what you deserve at last, Mary. You've reached the place you belong in a jump. It ain't usually that way; most times the folks that don't de-

serve things get 'em. Like me, now; I don't deserve anything half so good as this."

"You've forgotten the forty dollars you gave me to get away from here with," said Mary. "But I haven't. If it hadn't been for you I might still be here on Moseses Island, serving ice cream at Peart's."

"Well, that was the best forty dollar investment I ever made," grinned the Captain.

He donned his new uniform and attended to getting the boat off.

Mary sought a place alone on the stern and stood waving her hand in farewell to Moseses Island. When they were well out in the water she gave a little cry of triumphant happiness and turned her eyes to the sea, looking forward to further adventures, wondering what would happen next in the great wide world that lay before her.

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